

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 128,042 With 124 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

The 9th International Conference on Robotics and Mechatronics Will Be Held Virtually by the New Technologies Research Institute of Amirkabir University of Technology In Tehran on November 17-19

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Good Agreement in Short Time Possible

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Tehran and the remaining parties to the landmark nuclear deal of 2015 can reach a "good agreement in a short time" only in case of a "serious and positive" approach to the upcoming talks slated to start in the Austrian capital of Vienna at the end of this month.

"The Islamic Republic has no intention to be locked in the stalemate remaining from the previous negotiations...I believe that if the opposite sides enter in the Vienna [talks] with a serious and positive approach, it will be possible to achieve a good agreement in a short time," Amir-Abdollahian said in a post on Instagram on Friday.

The top Iranian diplomat said it was necessary to once again outline Iran's stance and views about the sanctions-removal talks in Vienna as the date of the negotiations has been finalized. He noted that he held "detailed and separate" phone talks with the foreign ministers of the P4+1 group of countries - China, Russia, Britain, Germany and France - last week and emphasized that the Islamic Republic would pursue a result-oriented approach to the talks and is "determined to achieve a 'good agreement'."

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S. Korea Has Not Released Iran's Frozen Assets



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The chairman of the Iran-South Korea Joint Chamber of Commerce says Seoul has not released frozen Iranian assets despite reports alleging it has done so.

"The \$3.5 billion in assets claimed to have been released was not part of Iran's frozen assets in South Korea," Hossein Tanhai added.

He made the comment after a report was released claiming \$3.5 billion in Iranian assets had been freed up.

The largest amount of frozen Iranian assets is in South Korea, standing at \$7 billion.

He also touched upon the status of trade transactions between the two countries,

"Exchanges between the two countries are very little and are mostly related to small firms working together unofficially," he explained.

"But as Major South Korean firms mostly work with the U.S., they are not working with Iran. Trade transaction between the two countries is tiny, amounting to less than \$150 million," he said.

"Most of our imports from South Korea include medical goods and paper. Our exports to that country is very limited and mostly includes oil and petrochemical products, which are exported to the country indirectly," he said.

He stipulated that South Korea's new envoy to Tehran has economic vision and tries to continue economic programs rather than political issues and for this reason, South Korea is in talks with the U.S. officials in order that the U.S. exempts Seoul from sanctions against Iran.

South Korea refuses to release Iran's frozen assets in the country under the United States' pressure. Tehran has, time and again, called on Seoul not to be swayed by the White House and to free up Iran's money. However, the South has, so far, failed to take practical action in that regard.

Tanhai's remarks when managing Director of Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) Ali Naderi has declared that more than 3.5 billion dollars of Iran's assets blocked in another country have been unfrozen recently. He did not mention more details.

IAEA Head Urges More Contacts With Iran Gov't

TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has announced it was "astonishing" that he has had no contact with the new Iranian government on several issues over Tehran's nuclear program. He has called for more contacts between the two sides.

The IAEA Director General on Friday raised concerns about the fact that the IAEA has yet to be contacted by Iran's new government to discuss several outstanding disputes regarding nuclear activities.

Rafael Grossi said it was "astonishing" that President Ebrahim Raisi's government had not been in contact since its election win in June.

"I have not had any contact with this government ... that has been there for more than five months," Grossi told reporters on the sidelines of a conference on nuclear security on Friday.

"I think that we should have had this contact much earlier... There's a long list of things we need to discuss," he added. The IAEA chief stated the only exceptions had been "technical conversations" with Iran's new atomic energy chief, Mohammad Eslami.

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Tehran, Islamabad to Start Barter Trade Sans Monetary Transactions

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan and Iran have decided to start barter trade through approved crossing points and sans any monetary transactions due to international sanctions on Iran, sources in Commerce Ministry told Business Recorder.

The pact was signed during a recent visit of Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood, to Teheran wherein the two countries expressed their intention to increase bilateral trade to \$5 billion per annum and remove all bottlenecks.

"It has been decided in consultation between the Government of Pakistan and Government of Iran that a barter trade mechanism will be established between Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Zahidan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (and other counterpart chambers)," the sources added. Both sides have already identified over 50 items for bilateral trade with rice and petroleum products at the top of the list.

The Barter Trade Mechanism will work in following ways: (i) the barter trade shall be done via land route through legal customs notified border crossing points between the two countries; (ii) there will be no monetary transaction under the barter trade arrangement. Pakistani importers will pay Pakistani exporters in lieu of goods and services exported by them in Pak Rupees and the same mechanism will apply on the Iranian side; (iii) on imports/exports of goods by either side, the party will submit documentary evidence such as Good Declaration to the focal persons in Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and counterpart Chambers viz. Zahidan Chamber of Commerce and Industry; (iv) in order to meet the objective of barter trade mechanism both parties must finalise international mechanism to remove difficulties in barter trade; (v) a copy of the contract for import and export with Iranian parties should also be submitted to Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Zahidan Chamber of Commerce and Industry; (vi) both Chambers of Commerce and Industry will forward a monthly statement to each other, within 15 days from the close of the month and would finalise a dispute settlement mechanism in order to sort out the trade disputes in barter trade; (vii) periodic review of the agreement will be carried out after each year by mutual consultations; and (viii) each party may terminate/rescind the agreement through a written communication addressed to the other party, with a minimum notice of three months. However, the transactions already initiated will be protected even if the MoU is terminated.

Iranian Oil Export Slowly Increasing

TEHRAN (IP) - A member of the Iranian Parliament's Commission of Energy says the country's oil export is gradually increasing, which promises more exports with the due plans developed.

Mousa Mousavi said: "Although Iran's oil industry is facing sanctions, we are witnessing an increase in oil sales and exports during the few last months."

Mousavi pointed to the private section and foreign investment's capacities as ways to fund the country's construction projects and noted: "Oil bartering increases the attractiveness of private sector's investment in the country's infrastructure including rail and road transportation projects."

Yet, U.S. President Joe Biden said on Friday that there were sufficient supplies of petroleum so other countries can reduce what they buy from Iran.

Biden's claim came as he announced the country was ready to return to the internationally signed Iran's nuclear deal or the so-called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), one of its implications was to ease the oil selling for Iran.

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Saudi Arabia to Continue Talks With Iran

SAUDI ARABIA (Dispatches) - In an interview with FRANCE 24, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, said talks with Iran would continue and that an additional round of negotiations between the regional rivals was expected soon.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said the four previous rounds of talks were merely "exploratory" rather than substantial, but said both sides were committed to engagement.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud expressed strong reservations, however, on Iran nuclear negotiations, which are set to resume in a few weeks, citing Tehran's past deception about its nuclear activities.

Regarding a recent diplomatic spat with Lebanon, the foreign minister rejected criticism from Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah that Saudi Arabia had deliberately sparked the crisis by recalling its ambassador after a Lebanese minister called the war in Yemen "futile". "There's no crisis with Lebanon, there is a crisis in Lebanon," he said, citing the dominance of Hezbollah.

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Russia Backs Lifting of Iran Sanctions in Vienna Talks

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says Moscow will advocate the lifting of sanctions on Iran and the full implementation of a nuclear deal - known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - between Iran and a number of other countries in the upcoming talks slated to start in the Austrian capital Vienna at the end of this month.

The JCPOA was signed between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) - namely Russia, the United Kingdom, China, the United States and France - plus Germany in 2015.

Former American president Donald Trump, however, unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the JCPOA in May 2018 and reimposed the anti-Iran sanctions that the historic deal had lifted. He also unleashed additional sanctions on Iran under other pretexts not related to the nuclear case as part of his so-called "maximum pressure" campaign, which practically deprived the country of all of the deal's economic benefits.

Following a year of strategic patience, Iran resorted to its legal rights stipulated in Article 26 of the JCPOA, which grants a party the right to suspend its contractual commitments in case of non-compliance by other signatories, and let go of some of the restrictions imposed on its nuclear energy program.

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TEDPIX Drops 17,000 Points on Saturday

TEHRAN (MNA) - TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dropped 17,301 points to 1.439 million on Saturday (the first day of Iranian calendar week).

As reported, over 5.748 billion securities worth 45.521 trillion rials (about \$1.083 billion) were traded at the TSE.

The first market's index lost 13,916 points, and the second market's index fell 30,950 points.

TEDPIX rose 58,000 points (4.1 percent) to 1.456 million in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

Gov't Planning to Reduce Social Harm

TEHRAN (IP) – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi described serving in the Kahrizak Charity Complex as a beautiful manifestation of public participation and said such charitable activities control many social harms.

Raisi visited the Kahrizak Charity Complex on Friday morning and talked in person with the clients, doctors and managers of the center.

The President also addressed the social workers at the center, saying: “What you are doing today and in this center is one of the beautiful manifestations of public participation in eliminating social harms”.

Referring to the government's support for public participation in social affairs, Raisi said: “Such public actions should be developed and Kahrizak is a successful example of the participation of public donors.”

Referring to the government's plan to reduce social harms, Raisi said: “The root cause of some social harms is in economic issues, and the government has put organizing the economic situation and controlling social harms on its agenda.”

Referring to yesterday's meeting of the Social Council, the President noted:



“We do not have a shortage of laws, but according to the assignment of laws for different agencies, it should be examined which agencies have performed their duties and which agencies have not performed their duties and why.”

“These harmed people are part of our family and we should try to help them,” the President said, referring to his visits to two treatment centers and social harm reduction centers this morning.

During the visit, the director, doctors and social workers of Kahrizak Complex gave explanations about their activities and treatment and support measures, and the clients discussed their issues and problems in person with the President.

Illegal Sanctions Removal Emphasized in European Tour

LONDON (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani said that the effective lifting of illegal sanctions and the importance of guaranteeing non-repetition were emphasized during his recent visit to the European countries.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister made the remarks at the end of his visit to the capitals of several European countries.

Ali Bagheri Kani tweeted on Friday night: During my trip to France, Germany, Britain and Spain, I had serious and constructive talks on bilateral, regional and international issues, including the forthcoming talks.

Bagheri traveled to Europe for four days for diplomatic consultations and met with officials from the foreign ministries of France, Germany, Britain and Spain. He also met with Enrique Mora, the deputy secretary general of the foreign action service, who is chairing the meeting of the joint commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Bagheri and Mora also met in Brussels on October 27 and in Tehran on October 14. The two sides agreed in a telephone conversation two weeks ago on the resumption of talks about the implementation of JCPOA in Vienna for November 26.

The deputy foreign minister described the purpose of the talks as the lifting of illegal sanctions.

Iran Reacts UN Rapporteur's Claim

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's High Council for Human Rights published the results of its investigations over the claims by a UN special rapporteur about a female prisoner in Iran.

The statement of the Iranian Human Rights body was in response to a tweet by the UN Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor claiming Atena Daemi was barred from contact with her family. The statement advised the rapporteurs to rely on authentic sources: “Special mandate holders should rely on credible sources.”

“The HCHR investigated the news and the results are as follows: she has met 34 times his family and lawyer during past 7 months. She has also no problem phoning her family in line with the relevant regulations,” Iran's High Council for Human Rights responded to Mary Lawlor.

The UN rapporteur's claims came as all prisoners in Iran have the right to contact and visit their families and lawyers under the rules and regulations.

Spanish Official Terms Talks With Iranian Counterpart as Fruitful



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Spanish Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Ángeles Moreno Bau in a message termed her talks with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani as fruitful.

“Fruitful meeting with my #Iran counterpart, @Bagheri_Kani, to strengthen our bilateral ties and our political dialogue,” Ángeles Moreno Bau wrote in her Twitter account on Friday.

“We have addressed: Bilateral affairs Nuclear agreement (#JCPoA) Regional issues, including the situation in #Afghanistan,” she added.

Bagheri Kani arrived in Spain to confer with Spanish officials on bilateral and regional issues.

According to Iranian diplomatic mission, Bagheri Kani is to hold talks on bilateral and regional issues, as well as on upcoming Vienna talks for lifting cruel sanctions against Iran.

Tehran, Islamabad Examine Strengthening Border, Maritime Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a virtual meeting, Iran's Border Guard Commander and the director-general of the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency have reviewed the latest developments related to bilateral cooperation in maritime and border management as well as conducting operations and patrols.

The virtual meeting was held in the presence of the delegations of the Border Guards Command of Iran's Police and the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency.

On the Iranian side, the meeting was attended by Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goodarzi, commander of Iran's Border Guards; senior officials from the security, legal and naval departments of Iran's police; as well as Colonel Mostafa Ghanbarpour, Iran's military attaché in Pakistan. The Pakistani side was composed of Admiral Mohammad Shoaib, director-general of the country's Maritime Security Agency, along with representatives from Pakistan's foreign and defense ministries.

The two sides discussed cooperation and different ideas for improving security, protecting fishermen, conducting operations, and joint patrols.

General Goodarzi and Admiral Shoaib also agreed to expand cooperation and future assistance in various fields.

In the virtual meeting, the relevant officers from the Border Guards Command of the Iranian police and the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency discussed in detail the agreements reached in various areas.

Austria Keen on Academic Cooperation With Iran

QOM (IRNA) - Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to Tehran Wolf Dietrichheim has underlined that his country welcomes academic cooperation with the Iranian University of Religions and Denominations.

Dietrichheim and his entourage held a meeting with president of the University of Religions and Denominations in Qom on Friday, discussing expansion of scientific and international cooperation.

Expressing satisfaction with the meeting at the University of Religions and Denominations, the ambassador said that this university is one of the most important academic centers in Iran active in inter-religion dialogue, and that it has been turned into one of the front-running Iranian universities in case of international exchanges; so, the Austrian government welcomes cooperation with the institute.



For his part, President of the University of Religions and Denominations Seyed Abolhassan Navvab emphasized on the role of Austria in inter-religion dialogues, expressing hope that Thursday visit by Austrian ambassador will help collaboration between the two countries especially in religious issues.

According to Navvab, Iran sees Austria as one of its most important partners for scientific cooperation, and many Iranian universities cooperate with renowned Austrian academic centers.

The two sides also held talks on ways to increase scientific coordination among the University of Religions and Denominations and Austrian universities in the framework of exchanging professors and students.

President Calls for Supporting Local Covid Vaccine Producers

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says local producers of coronavirus vaccines should be supported by buying their products in advance.

“In order to support the efforts made by these producers, locally-developed vaccines approved by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education should definitely be purchased in advance,” said Raisi in a meeting of the National Coronavirus Task Force.

He described local firms' production of COVID-19 vaccines as invaluable.

“Supporting the activities and production of vaccines by these companies is among the priorities of the government, and to that end, pre-purchasing these products can further encourage them to press ahead with, and expand their activities,” the president noted.

He appreciated round-the-clock and untiring efforts by medical personnel and all those involved in countering coronavirus.

“I hope we, with the cooperation of our noble people, will be able to reach a point of certainty in containing this disease and protect people's health by vaccinating more than 80 percent of the population,” he said.

President Raisi urged people to avoid any move that would lead to laxity in the observance of health protocols, adding the easing of some restrictions should not cause people to regard the disease as something ordinary.

He said travel to and from the country via land, sea and air borders should be controlled.

“Given that some neighboring countries are facing a new surge in the disease, it is necessary that individuals without a negative Covid test result be prevented from crossing the borders,” he added.

The President also stressed the need to review the previous approvals of the National Task Force Against Coronavirus, saying, “In this review, it should be determined how many of the approvals have been implemented and how many of them have not”.

Iran, Syria Sign Academic MoU

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An Iranian university affiliated with the Ministry of Defense signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Damascus on cooperation in various fields, from joint research to the exchange of graduate students.

After a meeting in the capital of Syria on Thursday, the presidents of Iran's Malek Ashtar University of Technology and the University of Damascus signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU).

The agreement entails collaboration between the two universities in the field of research, postgraduate studies, industries, technical sciences, mechanics, robotics and computer science.

The MoU was signed by Mohammed Yasar Abdeen, president of Damascus University, and Brigadier General Qassem Taqizadeh, president of Malek Ashtar University of Technology, which is associated with the Iranian Defense Ministry.

The gathering was also attended by Syria's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Bassam Ibrahim, Syrian Ambassador to Tehran Shafik Diop, and other ranking officials, SANA reported.

The Syrian minister stressed the importance of benefiting from the scientific and research capabilities of Malek Ashtar University and linking those experiences to industrial projects. For his part, Taqizadeh expressed the Iranian university's readiness to cooperate with Syrian universities in the field of research and graduate studies.

No Plan to Raise Gas Price

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji said no plans are on the table for raising the price of gas for consumers, adding 25 percent of high-consumption and bad-consumption gas subscribers take up about 50 percent of domestic gas who will be fined.

Owji said consumers who fail to follow the standard consumption pattern will undoubtedly be fined.

He announced the current figure of the country's gas consumption in the domestic, commercial and non-major sectors as 490 million cubic meters, and said: “This amount has increased by 140 million cubic meters compared to the same period last year, which is a very high figure.”

“Unfortunately, nothing has happened in the last two to three years in the investment sector for gas production, and therefore our gas production is similar to last year,” he said. “This is in a situation where gas consumption has increased by about 10 to 12 percent.”

Iran Aims to Import Chinese Housing Construction Tech

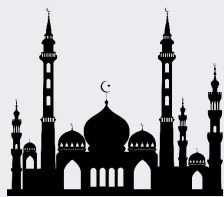
TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Rostam Ghasemi said Friday that Islamic Republic is in talks with China to import the country's Housing Construction Technology.

Ghasemi announced the continuation of negotiations with Chinese companies for the introduction of new technologies for housing construction in the country.

“Representatives of Chinese companies are currently present in the country and we are negotiating with them,” said the minister, adding that the Chinese are not going to bring their workers to the country, neither will they import engineers nor construction materials.

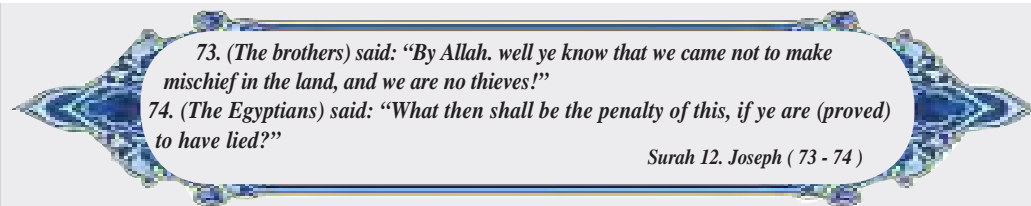
The Minister of Roads and Urban Development emphasized that the Chinese are going to bring their construction technologies to Iran to boost country's construction level. In late March 2021, Iranian and Chinese governments signed a 25-year agreement to develop cooperation between the two countries in various fields.

The document was signed by the former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi after the two top diplomats held talks at the Foreign Ministry in Tehran following the announcement of Iran-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in a joint statement during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tehran in 2016.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:48
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:17
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:13
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:40



Tehran-Yerevan Trade Exchanges Could Hit \$1b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia said that Iran's trade and business exchanges with Armenia could reach \$1 billion.

Speaking on Saturday among a number of members of the Board of Directors of Tehran Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) who traveled to the Armenian capital of Yerevan for participating in the Federation of Euro-Asian Stock Exchange (FEAS) Summit, Abbas Zohouri Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Armenia said that the two countries enjoy high capacities and potentials to boost their bilateral trade.

He described the level of trade and business ties between Iran and Armenia as 'increasing and satisfactory' and stated that bilateral trade between the two countries could reach from the current \$400 million to \$1 billion annually in the very near future since the two countries enjoy high potentials on the relevant issues.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Abbas Badakhshan Zohouri pointed to two free economic zones in Iran and Armenia and called on investors of the two countries to take advantage of the capacity created in Aras and Meghri free zones in line with boosting bilateral trade and business activities.



According to the report, the Iranian delegation, headed by Saeed Eslami Bidgoli Secretary-General at the Iranian Institutional Investors Association, travelled to Armenia to attend the Federation of Euro-Asian Stock Exchanges (FEAS) Summit which will be held in Armenia. During the meeting, Eslami Bidgoli put the current number of foreign economic activists at Iran Stock Exchange Market with a shareholding code at 6,100 and stated that Armenian traders and merchants, like investors of other countries, can invest at Iran Mercantile Exchange and benefit from its advantages.

Meanwhile Head of Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry has said the two countries plan to establish a joint industrial park in the near future.

Hervik Yarijanian said the two sides also have the potential to cooperate in other fields like banking, finance, agriculture, and extraterrestrial farming.

"We are negotiating with Armenian authorities to provide the necessary basis for the two sides' businessmen to be able to invest and produce goods together with the aim of gaining access to more distant markets such as Europe and Canada," he said.

Iranian Trade Delegation Leaves for Kazakhstan

BOJNOURD (IRNA) - A 20-member trade delegation from northeastern Iranian province of North Khorasan left for Kazakhstan on Saturday, the chairman of provincial chamber of commerce has announced.

Saeed Pourabadi said that members of the delegation are to visit agriculture and production units in the neighboring country.

Aims of the visit are to select target markets, find trade partners, meet with Kazakh businesspersons, and attract foreign investors, the official said.

A Kazakh official has already stated that his country supports Iran's extra-territorial cultivation in Kazakhstan.

Reportedly, North Khorasan Province has exported light concrete pallets and tomato paste to Kazakhstan during the current year.

KSC Feted With Award of Leading Organization in Quality and Innovation

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The national conference for honoring the leading units in quality and innovation was held on November 9 at the Conference Hall of Al-Zahra University of Tehran to mark the National Quality Day and to remind the position of quality in the process of sustainable development,



and Khuzestan Steel Company was decorated with the award of leading organization in quality and innovation.

According to reports, Head of Guaranteeing Quality of Khuzestan Steel Company Mr. Mahmoud Akaber received the award on behalf of the company.

Addressing the gathering, Head of Center for Strategic Studies of Tehran University Dr. Alireza Yousefi said that self-confidence is the most important pillar for strategic adjustment of human resources in the leading organizations, adding that if an organization wants to move on course of the excellence, it should boost the self-confidence among its personnel. He noted that in case of implementing the self-confidence, most of activities in the organization will be done by the staff and there will be no need for every second monitoring and involvement of the managers.

Yousefi went on to say that adjusting the livelihood of the staff is the other pillar of a successful organization.

Some goals of this are promotion of culture of self-assessment in the organizations and identifying the strong points and the grounds for improvement and honoring the economic activists in the field of quality.

Tehran, Minsk Ink MOU on Agro Cooperation



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and Belarus have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for expanding cooperation in the agricultural sector.

Based on the MOU which was signed on the sidelines of the Iranian Deputy Agriculture Minister Abbas Askarzadeh's three-day visit to Minsk, trade and commercial relations between the two countries in the fields of agricultural products, horticulture, fisheries, and aquaculture will be expanded.

The agricultural delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran headed by Askarzadeh traveled to Minsk, the capital of Belarus, to hold the second working group of the Iran-Belarus Agricultural Cooperation.

On the last day of his visit to the European country, Askarzadeh met with Belarusian Agriculture and Food Minister Ivan Krupko and discussed ways to further expand cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture.

During the meeting, Askarzadeh officially invited Krupko to visit Iran later this year.

The Belarusian minister also referred to the warm and friendly relations between the two countries and the great potentials of Belarus and Iran for cooperation in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry and called for the implementation of the agreements between the two countries and the removal of existing obstacles to the further expansion of mutual cooperation.

Enumerating Belarus' capabilities in the agricultural sector as well as dairy and food industries, Krupko said: "The Belarusian government is ready to meet some of the agricultural needs of the Iranian market, as well as the implementation of joint projects in the field of agriculture."

Pointing to the results of the second joint Iranian-Belarusian agricultural working group, Askarzadeh said: "During a visit to the Belarusian Food Industry Exhibition and a number of dairy factories, agricultural machinery units, and livestock farms, I came to the conclusion that there are unique capacities for developing cooperation and implementing joint projects."

"Belarus can supply part of Iranian market needs for grains, oilseeds, chicken, eggs, and dairy products and in return, Iran can meet Belarus' needs for a variety of fish and seafood, fruits, vegetables, and nuts," he said.

According to IRNA, In January-September 2021 the exchange of food and agricultural products between Iran and Belarus totaled \$8 million, 114.5 percent more than the figure for the previous year's same period.

Some 1,872,000 Tons of Commodities Traded on IME

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 1,782,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$454m on its physical market.

According to a report by the IME's international affair and PR, within the week, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1,474,000 tons of commodities worth more than \$242m.

On this floor, the IME's customers purchased 1,000,060 tons of cement, 269,529 tons of steel, 100,000 tons of iron ore, 20,800 tons of zinc, 15,500 tons of sponge iron, 6,520 tons of copper, 3,585 tons of aluminum, 18 tons of precious metals concentrate and 24 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME saw trade 387,350 tons of commodities on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor valued more than \$209m. Commodities sold on this floor included 182,900 tons of vacuum bottom, 81,033 tons of polymeric products, 68,844 tons of bitumen, 33,927 tons of chemicals, 16,000 tons of lube cut, 2,817 tons of base oil, 990 tons of sulfur and 230 tons of insulation.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 10,081 tons of commodities traded on it.



Iran, Philippine Int'l Symposium to Be Held on Nov. 18

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran-Philippine International Symposium in the field of 'nanotechnology' will be held on Thursday November 18 through video conference.

Leila Mameni, Secretary of Executive Committee of Symposium and Head of Nanotechnology Research Department of Agricultural Biotechnology Research Center broke the news on Saturday, saying that Iran-Philippine International Symposium will be held in joint cooperation with Iran's Agricultural Biotechnology Research Center and the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic, and Natural Resources Research and Development (DOST-PCAARRD) in the presence of experts in this field.

Starting cooperation of joint scientific cooperation between Tehran and Manila in the field of nanotechnology in agriculture, drawing new horizons for scientific, research and extension cooperation in areas such as exchange of scientific and technological information and technical knowhow, effective interaction between public and private sectors active in the relevant field, paving suitable ways for introducing Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and knowledge-based companies active in this field both in Iran and the Philippines are of the salient objectives behind organizing this symposium, she emphasized.

With the effective and constructive presence of faculty members and researchers active in the field of

'nanotechnology' and 'agriculture', "we will witness better organizing this prestigious international symposium," Mameni continued.

Headquarters to Develop Nanotechnology Development and Agricultural Research, Training and Extension Organization of Iranian Ministry of Agriculture and Philippine Ministry of Science and Technology are co-sponsors of the symposium.

It should be noted that the symposium will run until November 19 for a period of one day.

Necessity for Attention to Share-Holding, Investment at MSC

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - The CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) Mr. Mohammad Yaser Tayebnia, during the meeting of the supreme committee of development of the company, called for necessity in accelerating implementation of the current projects of the company and said the projects related to the sustainability, production, boosting productivity, reducing waste, boosting resistance and balance in the production chain should be prioritized.



Emphasizing the necessity for painting the picture of the outlook 1410 and 1450 of MSC, he said they should today take action for drawing up long-term plans for the ten-year and fifty-year outlooks and should have a share in the company's projects for turning the company into a successful one like famous global companies because MSC should be in the level of famous and successful international companies like Toyota, LG and POSCO.

Tayebnia reiterated that if the company only eyes protecting its quantitative share in the domestic market, it will definitely lose this position and share, noting that for boosting and protecting the quantitative share of the steel production, MSC should not think only of building and creating a new unit for production because this company and its different industrial and mining subsidiaries like Gol Gohar is a major share-holder as one of the steel-making producers, and therefore it is better to think of the formation of shareholders of Mobarakeh Steel Group.

He went on to say that the company should distance itself from the current dominating outlook mindset about the steel chain and protecting share of steel in the company because this company is able to do things that most of the domestic companies are unable to do.

Tayebnia added that therefore, we should think this point that the company should stand in higher standings of the steel chain in the next outlook, and mineral fields are the best example for it which are considered as the complementary to the steel chain.

Tehran, Zagreb to Hold Joint Chambers Working Group Soon

BELGRADE (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Zagreb Parviz Esmaili and President of the Croatian Chamber of Economy Luka Burilović announce that joint working group of Iran-Croatia chamber of commerce will be held soon.

Both sides discussed the most important opportunities and capacities for developing trade between private sectors and companies.

Meanwhile, Esmaili in a Twitter message said: In a useful meeting with Dr. Luka Burilović, President of @Hgk ,the latest status of the implementation of MOU with the @IranChamber; And we examined the most important opportunities of developing trade cooperation BW the companies of Iran and Croatia Croatia."

"We will move forward together," Iranian diplomat reiterated.

Netherlands to Impose Partial Lockdown to Halt Covid-19 Surge

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - The Netherlands will impose Western Europe's first partial lockdown since the summer this weekend, in a bid to stop a surge in Covid-19 cases, Dutch broadcaster NOS said today.

Bars, restaurants and non-essential stores will be ordered to close at 7pm for at least three weeks starting Saturday, NOS said, citing government sources. People will be urged to work from home as much as possible, and no audiences will be allowed at sporting events in the coming weeks. Schools, theatres and cinemas would remain open.

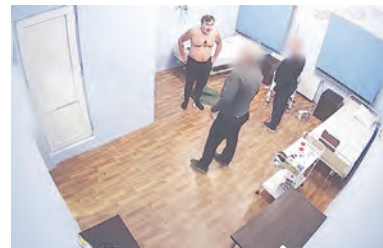
Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte's Cabinet will take a final decision later today, and will announce the new measures during a televised press conference scheduled for 1800 GMT.



Ukraine Calls on Georgia Not to Mistreat Saakashvili

KIEV (Dispatches) - Ukraine's president told Georgia's leader to refrain from "disproportionate coercive measures" against jailed, hunger-striking former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, who holds Ukrainian citizenship he obtained while in exile.

Saakashvili, Georgia's president for nine years until 2013, was arrested on Oct. 1 after returning to his native country to rally the opposition on the eve of municipal elections. He faces six years jail for abuse of office, from a 2018 trial held in absentia which he rejects as political. Georgian authorities on Monday transferred the 53-year-old politician to a prison hospital in the capital Tbilisi, just over five weeks after he declared a hunger strike in jail.



APEC Leaders Vow to Tackle Economic Recovery, COVID-19, Climate



WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - Leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum vowed on Friday to address economic recovery in the region by shoring up supply chains, tackling labor issues and continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a joint statement after a virtual meeting hosted by New Zealand, the leaders of the 21-member grouping also pledged to work together to address climate and environmental challenges.

"With the COVID-19 crisis far from over, we are determined to use all available macroeconomic tools to address the adverse consequences of COVID-19 and sustain economic recovery, while preserving long-term fiscal sustainability," the leaders said in their joint statement.

"We will intensify efforts to ensure goods continue to flow even under challenging circumstances."

The summit of the Pacific Rim countries came amid heightened regional trade and geopolitical tensions, particularly between China and the United States, and global efforts to tackle the pandemic and the climate crisis.

Addressing APEC leaders at the summit, U.S. President Joe Biden underscored his commitment to strengthening the U.S. relationship with APEC economies "in order to advance fair and open trade and investment, bolster American competitiveness, and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific".

Biden said the climate crisis was an enormous opportunity to create good jobs and that countries must work together to move towards a sustainable future, according to a White House statement.

"The President discussed ways to unleash the economic power of the region and to deepen U.S. economic engagement throughout the Indo-Pacific," the statement said, without elaborating.

China's President Xi Jinping told the meeting that economic and technological cooperation is important for the bloc and should receive further investment, Chinese state media reported.

Speaking via video link, Xi also said China would "unswervingly" expand its opening up to the outside world and share China's development opportunities with the world and Asia-Pacific countries, state broadcaster CCTV said.

The APEC summit came ahead of a much-anticipated online summit between Biden and Xi expected on Monday. U.S. officials have said they believe direct engagement with Xi is the best way to prevent the relationship between the world's two biggest economies from spiraling toward conflict.

China set the tone for the APEC meeting with Xi warning in a video recording on Thursday that the region must not return to the tensions of the Cold War era.

EU Sees Progress on Migrant Crisis After Belarus Flight Ban

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The European Union said today it was making progress in tackling a migrant crisis on the Belarus-Poland border after Turkey barred the citizens of three Middle East countries from flying to Belarus.

Hundreds of migrants, mainly Kurds from the Middle East, have been stuck for days on the border in near-freezing temperatures, with the WHO saying on Friday it was "very concerned" about their plight.

Poland is refusing to allow them to cross, with the West accusing Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko of bringing them into the country to send over the border in revenge for sanctions.

In the first move to prevent more migrants from arriving, Turkey said that Iraqis, Syrians and Yemenis would no longer be allowed on flights from Turkey to Belarus because of "the problem of illegal border crossings" into the EU.

"We are seeing progress on all fronts," European Commission vice president Margaritis Schinas told a press conference in Lebanon, adding that he would soon be travelling to Iraq and Turkey. A German foreign ministry spokeswoman said talks were continuing with airlines and countries along possible migrant routes, and that the Turkish ban showed "we already have some success".

Amid reports this week of more flights from Turkey and the Middle East carrying migrants to Minsk, Western countries are demanding Lukashenko and his main ally Russia take steps to end the crisis.

After an emergency meeting at the UN Security Council yesterday, the US and European delegations accused Minsk of endangering lives for political purposes and trying to divert attention "from its own increasing human rights violations".

Minsk and Moscow have accused EU countries of failing to live up to international standards by blocking the migrants, who they say are seeking shelter after Western military "adventures" in the Middle East.

In a show of support for Minsk, Russia has sent strategic bombers to patrol over Belarus this week and on Friday the two countries said a joint battalion of paratroopers was holding snap drills near the Polish border.



Protests Continue in Iraq Over Vote Fraud

BAGHDAD (AFP) - Some 2,000 supporters of Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi network protested Friday in Baghdad against alleged fraud at last month's parliamentary polls, a week after a similar rallies turned violent.

The demonstration comes days after Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi, whom Hashed supporters accuse of "complicity" in the alleged fraud, escaped unhurt from an unclaimed drone attack on his residence in Baghdad's Green Zone.

Hashed supporters gathered peacefully on Friday near one of the entrances to the Green Zone chanting slogans against Kadhemi and "death to America", AFP correspondents said. The faced off against security forces deployed to prevent them from storming the highly protected area, which is also home to the electoral commission, government offices and the US embassy.

Several dozen pro-Hashed protesters had set up camp at the same location last Friday after violent clashes with police that left one protester dead, according to a security source. One of the Hashed factions said two demonstrators were killed.

Political tensions have soared in Iraq over the results of the October 10 elections.

Kadhemi's office described Sunday's attack as a "failed assassination attempt".

Preliminary results saw the Conquest (Fatah) Alliance, the political arm of the Hashed, suffer a substantial decline in its parliamentary seats, winning 15 of the 329 seats in parliament -- down from the 48 it held previously.

The big winner this time, with more than 70 seats according to the initial count, was the movement of Moqtada Sadr, a Shiite Muslim preacher who campaigned as a nationalist and critic of Iran.

Hashed leaders have rejected the results as a "scam", though Iraq's electoral commission said Monday that a manual vote recount in some polling stations where complaints were filed by groups did not show any "fraud".

Final results are expected in the coming days.

Qatar to Act as U.S. Diplomatic Representative in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States and Qatar signed an accord for Qatar to represent U.S. diplomatic interests in Afghanistan, an important signal of possible future direct engagement between Washington and the Taliban after two decades of war.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Qatari counterpart, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, signed the agreement making Qatar the U.S. "protecting power" in Afghanistan at a State Department ceremony after holding talks.

"Qatar will establish a U.S. interest section within its embassy in Afghanistan to provide certain consular services and monitor the condition and security of U.S. diplomatic facilities in Afghanistan," Blinken said.

The move will further strengthen relations between Washington and the small, wealthy Gulf monarchy, which forged close ties with the Taliban by hosting the militants' only official office outside Afghanistan and by playing a key role in the talks that led to the 2020 deal for the U.S. troop pullout this year.

The agreement comes as the United States and other Western countries grapple with how to engage with the hardline Islamists after they took over Afghanistan in a lightning advance in August as U.S.-led forces were completing their pullout. The United States and other Western countries shut their embassies and withdrew

their diplomats as the Taliban seized Kabul, following which the militants declared an interim government whose top members are under U.S. and U.N. sanctions.

The United States, European countries and others are reluctant to formally recognize the Pashtun-dominated Taliban, accusing them of backtracking on pledges of political and ethnic inclusivity and to uphold the rights of women and minorities.

But with winter approaching, many governments realize they need to engage more to prevent the deeply impoverished country from plunging into a humanitarian catastrophe.

According to the new agreement, which comes into effect on Dec. 31, Qatar will dedicate certain staff from its embassy in Afghanistan to a U.S. Interests Section and will coordinate closely with U.S. State Department and with U.S. mission in Doha.

A senior State Department official said the United States would also continue its engagement with the Taliban's political office in the Qatari capital, Doha.

Consular assistance may include accepting passport applications, offering notarial services for documentation, providing information, and helping in emergencies, the U.S. official said on condition of anonymity. "The protecting power arrangement envisions that Qatar would facilitate any formal communication between the United States and Afghanistan," the senior U.S. official said.



Germany Threatens Measures Over Unacceptable Bosnian Serb Talk of Secession

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany threatened today to cut financial support to Bosnia, labelling calls for parts of Bosnia to secede or for the Balkan state to be weakened "irresponsible and unacceptable" and naming Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik as a particular culprit.

Bosnia is experiencing its gravest political crisis since the end of the war in the 1990s, reviving fears of a new conflict after Bosnian Serbs at the end of July blocked the work of the central government while Dodik announced measures aimed at unravelling key state institutions.

"We will not be able to accept the continuation of this irresponsible policy without taking action," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told Bosnian online platform politicki.ba.

"Germany is the largest bilateral supporter of Bosnia and Herzegovina," he added. "But it is clear: we cannot and will not channel German taxpayers' money into an entity that is actively working to destroy Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole state."

Maas said Germany "will also think about individual measures against those who question the territorial integrity of the country," adding that Berlin was coordinating closely with its European Union partners, the United States and Britain.

Dodik, whose secessionist ideas are widely seen as endangering a Bosnian peace deal, said in an interview with Reuters on Thursday <https://www.reuters.com/world/ill-not-sacrifice-peace-republika-srpska-bosnian-serb-leader-says-2021-11-11> that no political goals were worth the sacrificing of peace in Bosnia.

Under the U.S.-sponsored Dayton peace accords that ended the devastating 1992-1995 war, Bosnia was split into two autonomous regions - the Serb Republic and the Federation dominated by Croats and Muslim Bosniaks, linked by a weak central government.

The country's constitution is part of the peace deal.

German Foreign Ministry spokesperson Andrea Sasse said the situation in Bosnia would be discussed by European Union foreign ministers on Monday.



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A large billboard for IRAN NEWS PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS ADVERTISING. The billboard is white with black and red text. The word "IRAN" is in large, bold, red letters with a green outline. Below it, "NEWS" is in large, bold, black letters. Underneath "NEWS" is "PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS" in smaller, black, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom, "ADVERTISING" is in large, bold, black letters, with each letter containing a different colorful image. To the right of the main text, there is contact information: "TEL: 44253448-50" and "FAX: 44253234" in red, and "ADIRANNEWS@GMAIL.COM" in black. The billboard is set against a backdrop of a city skyline, including the Empire State Building, under a blue sky with some clouds. The billboard is mounted on a tall, dark metal pole.

Lufthansa Pays Back German Bailout Early

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German airline Lufthansa said today that it had finished repaying a €9-billion (RM41 billion) government bailout that saved it from bankruptcy at the height of pandemic travel curbs.

The repayment of the final tranche was completed “much earlier than planned”, Lufthansa said in a statement, thanks to cost-cutting measures, a capital increase and rising demand for

air travel after countries eased their coronavirus restrictions.

The German government is set to sell the stake it took in Lufthansa as part of the rescue deal by October 2023, the group added. The stake has already been lowered from 20 to 14 per cent.

Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr thanked Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government and German taxpayers for helping the group through “the most serious financial crisis in our company’s history”.



Malaysia's Economy Slumps in Q3

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia’s economy shrank 4.5% in the third quarter, contracting by more than expected after its rebound in the second quarter, but the central bank expects a quick recovery as coronavirus restrictions are eased and economic activities resume.

The third quarter performance was markedly worse than the median forecast for a 1.3% year-on-year contraction from a Reuters poll of economists.

But Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) said recent indicators suggested a more positive momentum going forward.

A pickup in production and construction activities, an improved labor market, and strong external demand would all support a recovery, the central bank said, projecting economic growth between 5.5%-6.5% in 2022. “The growth outlook remains subject to COVID-19 risk factors globally and domestically, stability in global financial markets and gradual easing of supply chain disruptions,” BNM Governor Nor Shamsiah Mohd Yunus cautioned during a news conference.

Malaysia is also set to benefit from strong growth among its major trading partners such as China and the United States, higher commodity prices, and robust demand for semiconductors to cater for remote work equipment and business digitalization, she said.

A surge in COVID-19 cases and the reimposition of movement curbs have weighed on consumption and investment activity, with the central bank cutting the country’s growth outlook for 2021 to 3%-4% in August.

Coronavirus infection rates, however, have slowed drastically in recent weeks amid a ramped-up vaccination program, boosting hopes of a turnaround. More than three-quarters of Malaysia’s 32 million population are fully vaccinated.

The Southeast Asian country will likely see a strong rebound in the fourth quarter, with a resumption in international travel expected to boost recovery, Capital Economics analyst Alex Holmes said in a note.

Malaysia this week announced quarantine-free travel lanes with neighboring Singapore and Indonesia, and expects to reopen its borders further by Jan. 1 at the latest.

Since last year, the government has rolled out 530 billion ringgit (\$127.66 billion) in stimulus packages, while BNM has slashed its policy rate by 125 points to help the economy withstand the fallout of the pandemic.

BNM said its monetary policy stance would continue to be determined by new data and information, and that it was “mindful of a premature withdrawal of policy support.”

Nor Shamsiah stressed that Malaysia was not facing any stagflation and that price pressures will remain moderate in 2022. Headline inflation is expected to average between 2%-3% this year, with core inflation remaining subdued amid spare capacity in the economy and slack in the labor market.

The central bank is not expected to hike its overnight policy rate until the third quarter of next year at the earliest, according to economists polled by Reuters.

Sri Lanka to Tax Car Crashes in Drastic Budget

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka slapped a tax on road accidents in a drastic austerity budget unveiled Friday as the country faces a major foreign exchange crisis.

Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa said vehicle accidents will be taxed under new revenue proposals to keep the budget deficit at 8.8 percent of GDP in 2022, down from 11.1 percent this year.

“It is proposed to impose a fee on vehicles meeting with accidents,” Rajapaksa told parliament. “Through this initiative, it is expected to reduce the number of motor vehicle accidents.”

He did not give details of the crash tax.

Sri Lanka’s roads are among the most dangerous in the world with over 3,000 traffic fatalities and some 25,000 seriously injured every year.

Rajapaksa admitted that the country was facing a serious crisis with foreign reserves at \$2.3 billion, down from \$7.5 billion when his brother Gotabaya took over as president two years ago.

“We have to accept that the increase in prices is due to a shortage of goods, the imposition of import restrictions, the overreliance on imports, the depreciation of the rupee together with the failure to adequately encourage manufacturers,” he said.

There were no measures to ease the import ban on a host of goods, including vehicles, spares, tiles and even some essential food imports, imposed in March last year.

However, Rajapaksa increased taxes on cigarettes, liquor and slapped a one-off tax on companies earning profits of over

2,000 million rupees (\$10 million) and raised the VAT on financial services from 15 to 18 percent.

He also announced raising the retirement age of public servants from 60 to 65 years, a move that will delay the payment of terminal benefits to thousands of employees and thereby reduce government spending for the next five years.

The budget deficit of 1,628 billion rupees (\$8.14 billion) will be bridged with borrowings, including \$5.08 billion in foreign borrowings, according to official figures.

Central Bank officials have said the country is facing its worst foreign exchange crisis since the advent of a free economy in 1978.

Ratings agency Moody’s downgraded Sri Lanka’s foreign debt rating last month.



WTO Fishing Proposal Favors Rich Nations

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The latest World Trade Organization proposals on ending fishing subsidies are unfair, weak and favor rich nations, an Indian official told AFP on Friday.

Governments spend billions of dollars every year subsidizing fishing industries that provide a livelihood to millions of people.

But the subsidies contribute to overfishing, which is threatening to lead to a collapse in the world’s fish ecosystem.

A draft text that would seek to end subsidies for illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing will be discussed in late November at the WTO in Geneva. But an Indian commerce ministry official told AFP on Friday that the ongoing discussions hadn’t yet addressed the concerns of developing countries like India.

“It doesn’t change anything for large fishing nations. It is weak, not balanced and favors the advanced fishing countries,” the official said, without wishing to be identified.

New Delhi had said earlier this year that it wants “big subsidizers” – countries like the US, Japan, South Korea, China and the European Union -- to “take greater responsibility to reduce their subsidies and fishing capacities.”

“Any agreement must recognize that different countries are at different stages of development and that current fishing arrangements reflect their current economic capacities,” Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told a WTO meeting on fishing subsidies in July. Global fisheries subsidies are estimated at between \$14 billion and \$54 billion a year, according to the WTO. WTO member states have been striving for over 20 years to reach a deal on the issue and in 2020 missed a deadline to reach an agreement by year-end.

Asia Prices Improve on Higher Demand



LONDON (Dispatches) - Asia liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices rose last week following three weeks of decline as demand increased in China after a sharp drop in temperature, while market players eyed Russian supply into Europe.

The average LNG price for December delivery into Northeast Asia rose to \$31.5 per metric million British thermal units (mmBtu), up \$2, or about 6.8% from the previous week, industry sources said.

Sustained below normal temperatures could deplete inventories rapidly and send buyers back to the spot market, where prices need to remain elevated to hold the arbitrage against the TTF, Emily McClain, senior gas markets analyst at Rystad Energy, said in a report. “While the market appears to be heaving a sigh of relief, the healthier supply-side picture is balanced by the onset of colder weather in North Asia and Europe and mounting vessel congestion at the Panama Canal, and we are certainly not out of hot water yet,” she said.

Market players are eying transit capacity auctions on Monday that could indicate Russian supply to Europe for the next months. Low gas flows from Russia and concerns over a political row with Belarus stoked fears of tight supplies this winter and sent gas prices higher on Friday.

“The spread between JKM and TTF is widening again, partly because of the pressure on TTF based on hopes and early signals that Russia indeed will step up its exports towards NW-Europe and the increased gas demand in Asia now colder weather has started to arrive,” said Hans van Cleef, senior energy economist at ABN Amro.

Pacific LNG freight spot rates hit a record high on Friday, surpassing \$291,000 per day, data intelligence firm Spark Commodities said.

Elsewhere, Angola’s LNG project has launched a tender to sell LNG for Nov-Dec delivery to as far as Southeast Asia.

The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) is seeking an LNG cargo for delivery in December, in a re-issue from a previous tender in which EGAT sought two cargoes for delivery in November and December.

Pakistan Says Afghanistan Near Economic Collapse

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Afghanistan is “at the brink of economic collapse” and the international community must urgently resume funding and provide humanitarian assistance, Pakistani Minister of Foreign Affairs Shah Mehmood Qureshi

told a meeting yesterday with US, Chinese, Russian and Taliban diplomats in Islamabad.

Qureshi spoke at the opening of the so-called “troika plus” meeting, which included new US special envoy to Afghanistan Thomas West. The delegates were also expected to meet later yesterday with Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

“Today, Afghanistan stands at the brink of an economic collapse,” Qureshi said in remarks opening the meeting, adding that any further downward slide would “severely limit” the new Taliban government’s ability to run the country. “It is, therefore, imperative for the international community to buttress provision of humanitarian assistance on an urgent basis,” he said.

That included enabling Afghanistan to access funds frozen by Western donors since the Taliban took control of the country in August, he said.

Resuming the flow of funding “will dovetail into our efforts to regenerate economic activities and move the Afghan economy towards stability and sustainability,” Qureshi said. Doing so would also benefit Western countries, he said later in comments to state media.

“If you think that you are far, Europe is safe and those areas you imagine will not be affected by terrorism, don’t forget the history,” he said. “We have learned from the history and we don’t want to repeat those mistakes made in the past.”

The UN has repeatedly said that Afghanistan is on the brink of the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with more than half the country facing “acute” food shortages and winter forcing millions to choose between migration and starvation.

The troika plus meeting represents West’s first trip to the region since taking over from Zalmay Khalilzad, the long-serving diplomat who spearheaded the talks that led to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan earlier this year.

The U.S. Department of State earlier in the week said that West also plans to visit Russia and India.

“Together with our partners, he will continue to make clear the expectations that we have of the Taliban and of any future Afghanistan government,” Department of State spokesman Ned Price told a briefing this week.

West, who was in Brussels earlier this week to brief NATO on U.S. engagements with the Taliban, told reporters there that the Islamists have “very clearly” voiced their desire to see aid resumed, as well as to normalize international relations and see sanctions relief.

He called for unity from allies on those issues, saying that Washington “can deliver none of these things on our own.”

Rosneft Warns of Potential Super Cycle in Energy Markets



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia’s Rosneft the world’s second-biggest oil company by output after Saudi Aramco, warned today of a potential “super cycle” in global energy markets, raising the prospect of even higher prices as demand outstrips supply.

Surging oil prices, boosted by rebounding economies worldwide, lifted Rosneft’s net profit to 314 billion roubles (RM18.3 billion) in the third quarter, versus a loss of 64 billion roubles a year ago, the company said.

“We observe a rapid growth in demand for traditional energy resources,” Rosneft Chief Executive Igor Sechin said in a statement. “As structural discrepancies between supply and demand on global energy markets are further revealed, we may witness a new super cycle on the oil and gas markets.”

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia, together known as OPEC+, have been increasing output to meet growing demand from late last year, and Rosneft’s oil production rose to 3.98 million barrels per day (bpd), up by 9 per cent, in the third quarter. Yet at a meeting last week, OPEC+ stuck to a plan to raise oil output by 400,000 bpd on a monthly basis, snubbing calls from the United States for a higher increase to keep oil prices in check.

The price of Russia’s flagship Urals oil blend rose to an average of \$70.5 (RM293) per barrel in the third quarter, up from US\$43 per barrel a year ago when the demand was still constrained by the pandemic.

To meet rising demand, Rosneft plans to increase investments in new projects, Sechin said, as it ramps-up its Vostok Oil project in Russia’s north, where it sold a 5 per cent stake to Vitol-led consortium for €3.5 billion (RM16.6 billion) last month.

“The key growth project, Vostok Oil, may result in Rosneft’s output rising throughout this decade, assuming OPEC+ restrictions are eased or lifted entirely,” brokerage Aton said in a note, valuing the entire project at US\$70 billion.

“Aparat” to Vie at VGIK Int’l Student Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian short film ‘Aparat’ by Hassan Najmabadi made it to the 41st VGIK International Student Festival.

‘Aparat’ has been selected to be screen at the competition section of the 41st VGIK International Student Festival. The 41st edition of the VGIK International Student

Festival will be held from November 15 to 19 in Moscow. This year, the festival received 167 applications from 48 countries and 114 film schools.

‘Aparat’ tells the story of six teenage boys who decide to work in the village cages so as to earn the money they need to rent an 8 mm camera from a wanderer.



AstraZeneca to Take Profit From COVID Vaccine Sales

LONDON (AFP) - British pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca said Friday it has begun to sell its Covid vaccine at a profit as the company posted a third quarter loss on higher costs.

AstraZeneca, which has sold its vaccine at cost during the pandemic in contrast to rivals including US giant Pfizer, said it expects “to progressively transition... to modest profitability as new orders are received” in the current fourth quarter and beyond.

AstraZeneca posted a net loss of \$1.65 billion (1.44 billion euros) for the third quarter compared with a profit after tax of around \$650 million in the July-September period last year, a statement said.

AstraZeneca said it experienced higher costs in the current third quarter following its \$39-billion takeover of U.S. biotech company Alexion, as well as increased research and development expenses across multiple programs, including its Covid treatments.

Last month, the drugs company revealed positive results from a trial of a treatment for Covid-19 symptoms, which is being produced alongside its vaccine.

Made from a combination of two antibodies, the AZD7442 treatment had been undergoing final clinical trials to assess its safety and efficacy.

AstraZeneca said the limited profit contribution from the COVID vaccine in the current fourth quarter “is expected to offset costs relating to” AZD7442.

Chief executive Pascal Soriot told a conference call with reporters Friday that AstraZeneca had always planned to stop selling its COVID vaccine at cost.

But he stressed that the company wants “the vaccine to remain affordable”.

The group added that revenue from its COVID vaccine, developed with the University of Oxford, totaled \$2.22 billion in the year to date following delivery of around 580 million doses worldwide.

Soriot said the company had “saved millions of hospitalizations” thanks to being the world’s second largest provider of COVID vaccines after Pfizer.

The drugs giant said total group revenue soared 50 percent in the third quarter to almost \$9.9 billion.



“AstraZeneca’s scientific leadership continues to provide strong revenue growth and exceptional pipeline delivery... including our long-acting antibody combination showing promise in both prevention and treatment of Covid-19,” Soriot said in the earnings statement.

“The addition of Alexion furthers our commitment to bring transformative therapies to patients around the world, and I am proud of our colleagues’ ongoing dedication and focus.”

The group completed its mega takeover of Alexion earlier this year.

Since taking the helm at AstraZeneca in 2012, Soriot has pushed the company into lucrative treatments such as cancer therapies, and the Alexion takeover gives it more heft in areas such as treating blood disorders.

Global Carmakers Now Target \$515b for EVs, Batteries



LONDON (Dispatches) - Global automakers are planning to spend more than half a trillion dollars on electric vehicles and batteries through 2030, according to a Reuters analysis, ramping up investments aimed at weaning car buyers away from fossil fuels and meeting increasingly tough decarbonization targets.

Less than three years ago, a similar analysis by Reuters found car companies planned to spend \$300 billion on EVs and related technologies. But looming zero-carbon mandates in cities such as London and Paris and countries from Norway to China have lent additional urgency to the industry’s EV-related investment commitments.

The most recent analysis shows carmakers planning to spend an estimated \$515 billion over the next five to 10 years to develop and build new battery-powered vehicles and shift away from combustion engines.

But industry executives and forecasters remain concerned that consumer demand for EVs could fall well short of aggressive targets without substantial additional incentives and even greater spending on charging infrastructure and grid capacity.

Brian Maxim, head of global powertrain forecasting at AutoForecast Solutions, likens the growing investment commitments in vehicle electrification to the Cold War: “Once a few manufacturers announced EV programs, everyone else had to announce their own or be viewed as being left behind.”

However, he added, “this leaves a lot of vehicle manufacturers planning significant volumes for a vehicle category that has unknown consumer acceptance, and will have minimal to no profit” for years.

Reuters compiled the investment data from company statements, investor presentations and regulatory filings.

Other surveys have come up with different spending projections. In June, consulting firm AlixPartners said auto industry investments in electric vehicles would reach \$330 billion by 2025. In 2020, all global automakers combined spent nearly \$225 billion on capital expenditures and research and development, according to AlixPartners.

Tesla Inc, the world’s largest EV manufacturer, appears to be the one company that is selling virtually every vehicle it can build and is readying new multibillion-dollar “gigafactories” near Berlin and Austin that will significantly boost its annual production capacity. In early November, the company was valued at \$1.2 trillion, more than twice the combined value of Volkswagen AG, Toyota Motor Corp, Ford Motor Co and General Motors Co.

Meanwhile, political and regulatory pressure is building on the world’s carmakers to begin phasing out production of fossil-fueled vehicles, including gasoline-electric hybrids, over the next 10-15 years, while ramping up output of full electric models.

A number of countries, from Singapore to Sweden, have said they will ban sales of new combustion engine vehicles by 2030. U.S. President Joseph Biden has said he wants 40% to 50% of sales to be electric vehicles by 2030.

UK Economic Growth Slows as Supply Problems Hit the Recovery

LONDON (Dispatches) - UK economic growth slowed between July and September as supply chain problems hindered the recovery, latest official figures show.

The Office for National Statistics said consumer spending increased as Britain continued to emerge from lockdown.

But that was offset by falls in other areas of the economy, leaving growth for the three months of 1.3%.

It means the economy is 2.1% smaller than in the final three months of 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

Grant Fitzner, ONS chief economist, said service growth expanded, helped by house buyers rushing to do deals before the end of the stamp duty holiday.

“However, these were partially offset by falls in both the manufacture and sale of cars.

“Notably, business investment remained well down on pre-pandemic levels in the three months to September,” he said.

Growth slowed significantly from a 5.5% rise recorded between April and June when many Covid restrictions were lifted.

The ONS said that the UK expanded by less than it initially thought in July and August, leading them to revise down growth figures for both months.

“What happened earlier in July and August was that we had the pingdemic,” said Sarah Hewin, head of research for Europe and the Americas at Standard Chartered. “And that ended up essentially holding the economy flat.”

In contrast, the economy grew by 0.6% during September. Chancellor Rishi Sunak said the latest figures showed his economic policies were working.

“The economy continues to recover from Covid and thanks to schemes like furlough, the unemployment rate has fallen for eight months in a row and we’re forecast to have the fastest growth in the G7 this year,” he said.

Kirsty Davies-Chinnok, from Professional Polishing Services (PPS), told the BBC that the company, which polishes metals such as stainless steel and aluminum, had been “very busy” throughout 2021 so far.

“We have had some bespoke projects, but we have



seen general work has increased,” she said.

The managing director said the manufacturing industry “didn’t really stop through most of 2020 and it has continued to increase”.

It has led to PPS deciding to invest further in its operations despite initially thinking it was “too risky” due to the pandemic, Ms Davies-Chinnok added.

However, rising material and supply costs had led to the firm increasing its prices to customers.

“We have had three price increases this year, which is unheard of,” said Ms Davies-Chinnok. “But we can’t finance doing business with our customers when our suppliers are increasing their costs to us.”

She added that PPS, which is very energy intensive business, was “incredibly lucky” by the fact it had renewed its energy contracts last December, before wholesale gas prices surged worldwide.

Longer term, Ms Davies-Chinnok said the biggest threat to her sector “has to be climate change” and said industry and government had to look at ways to make greener energy.

Business leaders expressed caution about the outlook, with Suren Thiru, head of economics at the British Chambers of Commerce, saying the data points to the UK economy “only likely to return to its pre-pandemic level next year, behind many of our international competitors”.

“Although monthly output rebounded through the quarter from July’s contraction this is more likely to reflect a temporary boost from restrictions easing, rather than a meaningful improvement in the UK’s underlying growth trajectory,” he said.

The ONS highlighted the impact of supply chain problems, which businesses have been struggling with for several months as they adjust to labor shortages and disruption at container ports.

Stocks held by manufacturers fell during the July-to-September quarter, the ONS said. And a slowdown in new UK car sales was in large part due to a global shortage of microchips. The ONS also noted that retailers were reporting “lower than usual” stock for the time of year.

Governments Risk Trillions in Fossil Fuel Climate Litigation

GLASGOW (Dispatches) - Governments which enact climate legislation risk being sued for trillions of dollars by fossil fuel companies seeking compensation for lost revenue and stranded assets, according to data that campaigners warn threaten pledges made at COP26.

Energy experts predict that more ambitious climate action from world leaders will significantly increase companies’ use of a tribunal mechanism that has already awarded billions to heavy industry.

Trade agreements such as the Energy Charter Treaty and NAFTA contain investor arbitration clauses, known as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), that allow foreign companies to sue governments over actions they say hit profits or investments. Campaigners say that energy companies are increasingly turning to this type of arbitration to recoup investments as governments accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels.

Jean Blaylock, trade campaigner at Global Justice Now, tells AFP these corporate courts -- “the global trade system’s dirty little secret” -- could “make a mockery” of commitments generated at the COP26 summit.

“We’re seeing the fossil fuel sector use investor-state dispute settlement to hold climate action to ransom,” she says.

“These companies have made unfathomable profits from fuelling the climate crisis, we cannot let them demand even bigger pay-outs.”

AFP has obtained excerpts from a presentation given at a September trade event by consultancy firm Berkeley Research Group (BRG), which predicted that climate legislation would lead to a rise in private lawsuits.

“Increased climate policy ambition (e.g. CAT Ratings) will drive the policies behind climate-related disputes,” said an excerpt.

Good Agreement...

FROM PAGE 1

Amir-Abdollahian emphasized that achieving a good agreement calls for the “effective and verifiable removal of sanctions and the return of the opposite sides to their full obligations” as per the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

He said Washington’s behavior, including in imposing new sanctions against Iran, has made the provision of its “objective guarantees” an unavoidable necessity.

The foreign minister noted that his deputy and the country’s chief negotiator, Ali Baqeri-Kani, held “explicit and useful” talks in European capitals this week.

Amir-Abdollahian further said, “As I have repeatedly emphasized, the administration of the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue the policy on the expansion of balanced ties with countries based on mutual respect and common interests with seriousness and is determined not to tie the improvement of bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation to the issue of the JCPOA.”

IAEA...

FROM PAGE 1

Grossi, who had been hoping to visit Iran before the next meeting of the IAEA’s board of governors starts on November 22, is still waiting for an invitation.

Iran has stopped observing some conditions of the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA) in 2019, after the United States withdrew from the plan in 2018 under then President Donald Trump and began imposing sanctions on Tehran.

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has said the IAEA should not turn into a plaything for terrorist groups.

Eslami stated “nuclear terrorism” has levelled accusations against Iran’s nuclear program using “seditious ploys and ... undocumented evidence”.

“Such behavior has become threadbare,” noted Eslami, who is also the vice president.

Iranian Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

After 13 years of intensive international negotiations, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was concluded on July 14, 2015. One week later, UN Security Council ratified Resolution No. 2231 and attached it to Annex A of the resolution.

Yet, after Donald Trump took office as the U.S. President in January 2017 and took a few preliminary steps to fulfill the deal, he unilaterally withdrew from the agreement on May 8, 2018, and introduced the harshest sanctions in history against Iran in line with his ‘maximum pressure’ campaign against the Islamic Republic.

Saudi Arabia...

FROM PAGE 1

The prince urged Lebanon’s political leadership to, once and for all, tackle the role of Hezbollah. “The endemic political and economic corruption that continues in Lebanon is why we see no use for our ambassador to be present in Lebanon right now,” he said.

He said Hezbollah seemed to be doing its utmost to block the probe into the deadly Beirut port explosion. “We call for an independent transparent investigation into this terrible tragedy,” he said.

The foreign minister also denied reports that Saudi Arabia was withdrawing troops from Yemen. The situation was deadlocked both militarily and diplomatically, he said, lamenting that the Houthis had not agreed to a Saudi proposal for a ceasefire earlier this year.

Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA have since April held six rounds of talks in Vienna, which began after the U.S. administration of Joe Biden voiced willingness to rejoin the nuclear agreement, although Washington has shown an overriding propensity for maintaining the sanctions as a tool of pressure.

Envoys from Iran and the P4+1 are expected to hold the seventh round of discussions in Vienna on November 29.

“We will advocate that the agreements that were concluded within the framework of this document in 2015 be resumed in full. Of course, this implies the return of the United States to fulfill its obligations, including the lifting of all sanctions introduced in the context of the JCPOA,” Lavrov said on Friday.

The Russian foreign minister also said that the JCPOA had been among the topics discussed in Paris in the “2+2” format between Russian and French defense and foreign ministers. “Here, we have prospects for more constructive cooperation,” Lavrov added.

Benteke to Get Rare Chance for Belgium

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Christian Benteke will end a two-year wait to start for his country after coach Roberto Martinez included him in the line-up for their World Cup qualifier against Estonia in Brussels.

The Crystal Palace forward had started only three matches for Belgium in the last five years despite 42 call ups since Martinez took over as coach in 2016, frustratingly consigned to the bench for almost all that time.

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Mane Taken Off As Precaution

LOME (Dispatches) - Sadio Mane's substitution in a World Cup Qualifier for Senegal yesterday was not due to anything serious and only taken as a precautionary measure, coach Aliou Cisse said. The Liverpool star left the field after 27 minutes after a clash with a Togo defender in the 1-1 draw in Togo.

He looked to have either hurt a rib or his hip, which the coach did not expand on afterwards.

But Cisse did tell reporters: "There is nothing bad. We only took him out as a precaution, not for something serious."

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SPORTS

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2021

Four Players Ejected as Pacers Top Jazz

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Malcolm Brogdon scored a game-high 30 points and the Indiana Pacers ended a four-game road trip with a 111-100 victory over the Utah Jazz in a wild game in Salt Lake City.

A night after losing at Denver against a Nuggets team that was playing without suspended MVP Nikola Jokic, the Pacers seemed at a disadvantage against a Jazz team with all of its starters and a spotless home record entering the night.

Utah, however, finished the game without three of its key players after Donovan Mitchell (26 points), Rudy Gobert (19 points, 11 rebounds) and Joe Ingles were ejected following a fracas that also resulted in the Pacers losing starting center Myles Turner for the final four minutes.

With Indiana leading 102-92 -- after taking the lead for good in the second quarter -- Gobert and Turner got involved in a physical tit-for-tat that threatened to devolve into a large brawl at the 4:01 mark of the fourth quarter. The ruckus began when Turner hit a driving Gobert from behind under the basket.

Clippers 112, Heat 109

Paul George scored 27 points and Reggie Jackson added 22 as Los Angeles held on to push its winning streak to six games with a victory over visiting Miami.

Eric Bledsoe added 21 points as the Clippers rallied from an early 17-point deficit then held off a late Heat run while improving to 3-0 at the start of a six-game homestand.

Bam Adebayo amassed 30 points and 11 rebounds for the Heat. Kyle Lowry scored 22 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter as Miami, playing without Jimmy Butler (ankle) and Markieff Morris (neck), lost its third straight and fourth of its last five games following a 6-1 start.

Raptors 115, 76ers 109

Fred VanVleet scored 32 points, including a clutch 3-pointer with 24.8 seconds remaining, and Toronto defeated host Philadelphia.

Pakistan Party Falls Flat After Agonizing Cricket Loss

KARACHI (AFP) - Pakistan cricket fans reacted largely with good grace and humor Friday to their team's exit from the Twenty20 World Cup, after an unbeaten run to the semi-finals had given the nation hope they could win the title for a second time.

The team bowed out on Thursday night, losing by five wickets to Australia in a see-saw match in Dubai settled with an over to spare.

The national mood was summed up by Prime Minister Imran Khan -- a former captain and one of cricket's all-time greats -- who said the side should be proud.

"I know exactly how all of you are feeling right now because I have faced similar disappointments on the cricket field," he tweeted.

"But you should all be proud of the quality of cricket you played & the humility you showed in your wins."

He also congratulated Australia, who face neighbors New Zealand in Sunday's final.

Tens of thousands of fans gathered on Thursday night in parks, clubs and shopping malls to watch the semi-final, which was broadcast on giant screens erected for the occasion.

It was very much a party atmosphere, particularly as the Pakistani opening pair flayed the Australian attack, before a wobble saw the team finish on 176-4 after 20 overs.

Some were prematurely celebrating victory as the first Australian wicket fell for just one run. But the bubble burst and the Aussies bashed their way to victory -- Matthew Wade finishing with a spectacular three sixes in a row.

Fans on social media heaped blame for the loss on Hasan Ali, vilified after dropping a catch at a key point of the match.

But many more leapt to his defense, pointing out how many times he had won games for Pakistan.

"We were struck dumb and all clutched our heads," said Areeba Shakeel, a technology student who watched with friends at a shopping mall in Karachi.

"Everybody was blaming Hasan for the defeat," she told AFP.



Gary Trent Jr. and OG Anunoby contributed 20 each and Chris Boucher had 17 for the Raptors, who snapped a three-game losing streak.

Tyrese Maxey led the Sixers with 33 points and Tobias Harris returned from a six-game absence due to health and safety protocols to produce 19 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

Meanwhile Chicago Bulls centre Nikola Vucevic has entered the NBA's Covid-19 health and safety protocols, the team confirmed, with ESPN reporting he has tested positive for the virus.

The 31-year-old from Montenegro, a two-time NBA All-Star in his 11th NBA campaign, would be sidelined for 10 days or until he tests negative twice in a 24-hour period with a positive test as opposed to contact tracing.

Vucevic guarded Philadelphia 76ers star Joel Embiid of Cameroon in back-to-back games before Embiid tested positive for Covid-19 last week.

The Bulls, who share the Eastern Conference lead with Washington at 8-3, reportedly have been fully vaccinated for Covid-19.

Chicago will begin a five-game road trip at Golden State that includes stops at the Los Angeles Clippers and Lakers, Portland and Denver before the Bulls return home on November 21 against New York.

Murray Loses To Paul In Stockholm

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - America's Tommy Paul described Andy Murray as "a legend" after defeating the former world number one in the Stockholm ATP quarter-finals.

Paul, ranked 52, beat three-time major winner Murray 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 and will take on compatriot Frances Tiafoe for a place in the final.

"He is a legend but I played some of my best tennis today," said 24-year-old Paul.

"It was the game plan to keep him running after his long match (against top seed Jannik Sinner) yesterday."

Tiafoe made the last-four by seeing off Britain's Dan Evans 1-6, 6-1, 6-1.

Felix Auger-Aliassime swept into the semi-finals with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Botoc van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands to register his 100th career win on the ATP circuit.

The 21-year-old hit 11 aces and next faces childhood friend and fellow Canadian Denis Shapovalov.

Third seed Shapovalov, who won the Stockholm tournament the last time it was played in 2019, defeated France's Arthur Rinderknech 4-6, 6-3, 7-5.



Premier League Clubs Oppose Biennial World Cup Plan

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League clubs have unanimously opposed FIFA's plans for a biennial World Cup and extended international breaks from 2024, the league's chief executive Richard Masters said on Thursday.

Football's world governing body is considering holding the global showpiece event every two years instead of every four once the international match calendar is revamped after 2024.

"The Premier League is committed to preventing any radical changes to the

post-2024 FIFA International Match Calendar that would adversely affect player welfare and threaten the competitiveness, calendar, structures and traditions of domestic football," Masters said.

"We are open to reforms and new ideas, but they must enhance the complementary balance between domestic and international football in order to improve the game at all levels."

FIFA's plans have been met with resistance from several European member associations as well as governing body UEFA.

Earlier on Thursday, the Premier League announced the dates for the 2022-23 season, which will pause in mid-November to accommodate the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Verstappen to Swap 33 for No.1 If He Wins F1 Title

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen fans will have to get used to a new number next season if Red Bull's Formula One leader wins the world championship.

The Dutch driver told reporters at Brazil's Sao Paulo Grand Prix that he would not hesitate to take the number one reserved for the world champion if he ends Lewis Hamilton's reign.

"Absolutely," said the 24-year-old, who has raced with the number 33 since his debut in 2015 and whose "Orange Army" of fans follow him with it prominent on shirts, flags and even tattoos.

His Twitter handle is @Max33Verstappen.

"How many times do you have the opportunity to drive with number one? And it's good for merchandise as well, you know. So it's smart to do that," he said.

The number one was last raced in 2014, the year after Sebastian Vettel won his fourth championship in a row for Red Bull.

Seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton has raced with the number 44 while Mercedes team mate Nico Rosberg retired immediately after winning the 2016 title.

Verstappen is 19 points clear of Hamilton with four races remaining, including Sunday's at Interlagos, but he made clear that he was taking nothing for granted.

"In four races a lot of things can happen," he said. "We are looking good but things can change very quickly ... I've had a bigger lead already in the championship and that disappeared within two race weekends."

Nobody, however, will win more races this season than the nine he has so far. Hamilton is on five, half his average since 2014.

Verstappen has won the last two races in Texas and Mexico City, but he avoided partying last Sunday to fly straight to Brazil.

The Red Bull driver is in a relationship with Kelly Piquet, daughter of triple world champion Nelson, and they spent time at the family home.



Djokovic Has Federer Finals Record in Sight

ROME (AFP) - Novak Djokovic is ready to cap a draining year at the ATP Finals as he enters the end-of-year tournament with Roger Federer's all-time wins record firmly in his sights.

Recently crowned the season-ending world number one for a record seventh time, Djokovic just missed out on winning all four Grand Slams in a single year.

Defeat in the US Open final to Daniil Medvedev in September came after triumphs at the Australian Open, Roland Garros and then Wimbledon.

That left him level with both Federer and Rafael Nadal on 20 Grand Slam wins, but he will equal his long-time Swiss rival's record of six Finals titles should he prevail in Turin, where the tournament moved over a decade in London.

He is in good form after overcoming world number two Medvedev in the Paris Masters final last weekend, his first tournament following a near two-month break.

"I haven't played so much as in previous years in terms of the amount of tournaments but I did have a lot of exhausting events that I played, particularly in grand slams," Djokovic told reporters.

"When I say exhausting I don't just mean physically but emotionally and mentally, probably unlike any other year that I've had."

"It did take a lot out of me and I just felt like I needed that break in order to rejuvenate and try to get ready for a strong finish to the season."

World number one Djokovic has been drawn with Stefanos Tsitsipas, Andrey Rublev and Casper Ruud in the Green Group at the November 14-21 tournament, which features the world's top eight ranked players split equally into two groups from which four players qualify for the semi-finals.

The 34-year-old Serb hasn't won the ATP Finals since 2015 but has neither Federer nor Nadal in his way this year and begins his bid for end-of-season glory against Ruud on Monday afternoon.

