

Health Ministry Announced on Monday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 129,711 With 82 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Director General of International Affairs of Iran's Judiciary Alireza Saaedi Said That Iran Had Demanded Five Countries to Follow Up the Case of Martyr Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani's Assassination

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Iran Lashes Out at U.S. Economic Terrorism On Developing States

TEHRAN (MNA)– Criticizing US economic terrorism on developing states, Deputy Speaker of Iran Parliament said that continued use of unilateral coercive actions, such as economic terrorism on developing countries, is a serious concern.

Ali Nikzad who has traveled to the Spanish capital of Madrid to participate at the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), said that US economic terrorism imposed on the developing states remains a matter of serious concern that should be dealt with.

Speaking at the first meeting of the parliamentary network of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), he added, "Here, I would like to thank Azerbaijan for presenting this outstanding and organized idea in this meeting."

The desire to maintain independence and to avoid competition between the two superpowers has been fundamental ideas of Non-Aligned Movement, he said, adding, "Since its establishment, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has focused on ensuring national independence, political sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of member states."

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China, Russia Ready To Hold Joint Naval Drills With Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says Russia and China have indicated their readiness to hold joint naval maneuvers with Iran.

Speaking in an interview with Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) on Sunday, the Iranian commander said the country's Navy carries out annual maneuvers, adding, "We will also hold drills this year." "We have invited different countries to take part in the drills, and Russia and China have so far voiced their readiness to do so," Irani noted.

The commander added that different units of Iran's Armed Forces take part in joint maneuvers with other countries.

Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levan Dzhagaryan said in August that Iran, Russia and China will hold joint maritime exercises – dubbed CHIRU – in the Persian Gulf around late 2021 or early 2022, to ensure international shipping safety and combat piracy. "At the end of this year or the beginning of the next year, the annual joint naval exercises, CHIRU, will be held in the Persian Gulf region. Russian, Iranian and Chinese warships are taking part in it. The main aim is to practice actions on ensuring international shipping safety, and combating sea pirates," Dzhagaryan said in an interview with Sputnik.

Late in December 2019, Iran, Russia and China staged a four-day joint maritime exercise in the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman area. The drills, dubbed the 'Marine Security Belt' exercise, covered 17,000 square kilometers and consisted of various tactical exercises such as target practicing and rescuing ships from assault and incidents such as fires.

The Sea of Oman is a particularly sensitive waterway as it connects to the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes and which in turn connects to the Persian Gulf.

Iran to Focus on Removal of U.S. Sanctions in Vienna



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top negotiator says complete and verifiable removal of "tyrannical and illegal" sanctions imposed by the United States serves as the primary goal of the Islamic Republic's return to the forthcoming round of negotiations with the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has entered the talks with a strong will and elaborate preparations in order to ensure the removal of unlawful and cruel sanctions," Ali Baqeri-Kani, Iranian deputy foreign minister for political affairs, said in an exclusive interview with IRIB News Agency in Vienna.

"The composition of the Iranian delegation shows Tehran's determination and seriousness to take steps to ensure the removal of the bans imposed by Americans against the Iranian nation," he said.

Baqeri-Kani expressed hope that the discussions would play an effective role in helping Iran achieve such a purpose.

He also said that the Iranian diplomats have already held meetings with some representatives of the P4+1 group of countries – Britain, France, Russia, and China plus Germany – ahead of the Vienna talks.

"The main focus and priority of the Vienna negotiations will be on the removal of sanctions. The duration of the talks, therefore, cannot be forecast as of now," Baqeri-Kani said when asked about the possible duration of the new round of talks in the Austrian capital.

He noted that the future perspective of the talks will be discussed by various delegations when the negotiations open on Monday evening, adding that the framework and timing of the Vienna talks would be determined subsequently.

Baqeri-Kani left Tehran for Vienna on Saturday to attend the seventh round of talks that are intended to bring the US back to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal.

A return to the JCPOA would mean Washington needs to remove its unlawful sanctions on Tehran.

Tehran insists that all sanctions must first be removed in a verifiable manner before the Islamic Republic reverses its remedial measures.

Some European States Seeking to Prolong Vienna Talks

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Stating that the Iranian negotiating delegation will enter the Vienna talks with a 'serious will', Khatibzadeh said that some European countries do not come to Vienna with strong will and are seeking to prolong the talks.

Speaking in his weekly press conference, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh answered questions on a wide range of topics.

Iran condemns some Islamic, Arab countries' normalization of ties with Zionist regime Emphasizing the determination of the Islamic Republic to support and protect the rights of the Palestinian people, Khatibzadeh condemned the normalization of relations between some Islamic and Arab countries with the Zionist regime.

"The Zionist regime is systematically violating the rights of the Palestinian people," he said. Referring to the recent talks of the British and the Zionist foreign ministers, Khatibzadeh said that the fact that on the eve of Vienna talks, the British Foreign Secretary held talks with the side [Zionist regime] that has been trying to destroy the JCPOA shows that some European countries do not come to Vienna with the strong will and are seeking to prolong the talks.

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S. Korea Hopes For Progress in Iran Nuclear Negotiations

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- South Korea on Monday welcomed the resumption of negotiations on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and expressed hope for "substantive progress," amid the ongoing diplomatic rows over Teheran's assets frozen here under U.S. sanctions.

The United States, Iran and five world powers gathered in Vienna earlier in the day to discuss ways to salvage the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which imposed limits on Tehran's nuclear program in exchange for eased sanctions. Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia were also involved in the talks.

"The Korean government looks forward to substantive progress and encourages all parties involved to engage with patience," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

It added it hopes all parties concerned will reach agreement on the nuclear accord and faithfully comply with it to promote regional peace and stability.

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Russia Optimistic On Vienna Talks

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Opportunities still exist for the parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal to come to an agreement in Vienna, says Russia's lead negotiator, a day before the resumption of the high-profile negotiations in the Austrian capital, whose main goal, as asserted by the Iranian side, is to remove Washington's anti-Iran sanctions.

"The attitude is positive, in a sense that it is necessary to make every effort to successfully finish the talks, as the alternatives vary between bad and really bad," Russia's permanent representative to the international organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, told Sputnik on Sunday.

"Opportunities to come to an agreement still exist," he added.

On Saturday, Ulyanov's Iranian counterpart, Ali Baqeri-Kani, left Tehran for Vienna to take part in the first round of the Vienna talks under President Ebrahim Raisi and the seventh since they were launched in early April.

The Raisi administration insists that its primary target in the talks is to have all of the United States' unlawful sanctions removed in a verifiable manner.

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Terrorist Team Dismantled in SW Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Islamic Republic of Iran Law Enforcement Forces (NAJA) announced in a statement that a terrorist team was dismantled in Khuzestan, the southwestern province of Iran.

NAJA in a statement issued on Monday said that the members of a terrorist team attacked a patrol vehicle at a police station in Shadegan City in July.

Following the Intelligence activities of the police forces of the Khuzestan province, all three members of the terrorist team were identified in Shadegan City and arrested during a series of operations in their hideouts, the statement added. According to the statement, police forces seized three guns and significant amounts of explosives and ammunition in the members' hideouts.

Tehran Not to Allow Insecurity, Foreign Interference in Region

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran will not allow insecurity and foreign interference in the region, underlining the significance of collective interaction and common understanding among regional countries as the main factors blocking foreign interference, sedition and conspiracies.

Raisi made the remarks in a Sunday meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the 15th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Turkmenistan's capital city of Ashgabat.

Raisi's chief executive pointed to the deeply-rooted historical, cultural, and religious commonalities between Iran and Azerbaijan, saying, "The two countries enjoy long-standing and close bilateral relations and will not allow such ties to be damaged by enemies."

Raisi also pointed to Iran's unwavering support for Azerbaijan's independence and territorial integrity, saying, "We will not allow any form of insecurity and foreign presence in the region."

"Experience shows that wherever regional states resolved their issues through common understanding and dialog, no room was left for foreign interference and incitement," the Iranian president noted.

Raisi expressed concern over growing instability in the region due to the presence of extra-regional forces, describing the Daesh terrorist group and Israel's acts of



terrorism as the two major threats facing the region that have to be confronted.

He went to say that Washington and the Tel Aviv regime are seeking to disrupt Tehran-Baku ties, calling on Azerbaijan to exercise vigilance against such conspiracies.

He further stressed that foreign interference will harm the interests of regional countries.

The Iranian president also welcomed Aliyev's call for the development of transit routes and stronger economic relations between the two neighboring countries.

For his part, the Azerbaijani president stated that Baku attaches special importance to its relations with Tehran and will never allow such ties to be disrupted.

Referring to the talks and contacts between the officials of the two countries to resolve some misunderstandings between the two countries, Aliyev said, "We are committed to the security of the border areas and will not allow any country to disrupt bilateral relations."

Aliyev highlighted that his government was determined to resolve existing transit obstacles and to facilitate the activities of Iranian companies present in Azerbaijan.

Baku Stance on Tehran Concerns Promising

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has described the Azerbaijani president's comments on Iran's concerns about foreign presence at its borders as "promising".

"On our concerns, the Azerbaijani president had promising comments [during his meeting with his Iranian counterpart] and reiterated that Baku will act accordingly," Amir Abdollahian said in an Instagram post.

"The will of the president is all-out expansion of ties. Cooperation in the fields of transit, energy, tourism, culture, ... is among the topics reiterated and agreed by both sides."

The foreign minister also described relations between the two countries and nations as "beyond being neighbors" and into "kinship".

He also said Tehran and the Azerbaijan Republic had important political, diplomatic and security consultations a day before the presidents' meeting, stressing that Iran will continue to expand ties with the neighboring countries.

Iran Judiciary Receives Documents on Martyr Soleimani's Assassination

TEHRAN (IP) - The Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) for Legal Affairs said plenty of information and documents were provided to the Judiciary to prove the direct order of the former U.S. president for the assassination of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

Sohrab-Ali Shamkhani said on Monday: "In several aspects, we cooperated with the judiciary, both to the officer and to the relevant plaintiff; plenty of information and documents have been provided to the judiciary to prove the crimes committed by the direct order of US' president."

The legal deputy of IRGC said that thousands of comprehensive documents have been prepared and provided to the judiciary, expressing hope that the issue will be resolved as soon as possible.

"A verdict is on the verge of issuing in the case of the



assassination of Lt. Gen. Martyr Soleimani and it will be concluded soon," he continued.

Shamkhani stated that thousands of people had filed a lawsuit in court to bring the perpetrators of the heinous crime to justice.

Also, another keynote speaker of the session, the

Special investigator for International Affairs, Saeed Farhadinia, said that the assassination of Lt. Gen. Martyr Soleimani is an absolute violation of the Convention on Terrorism and Resolution 1556, for which the US should be responsible.

He added: "124 perpetrators have been identified and arrest warrants have been issued for 43 people and also 13 specialized meetings have been held with 700 correspondences; Of course, 9 countries have been given judicial commission to pursue this case".

People Have Rightful Demands About Water



TEHRAN (IFP) - Judiciary Chief Mohseni Ejei has said people have rightful demands and concerns over the issue of water.

Mohseni Ejei however noted that the Iranian people must be vigilant in the face of enemy movements and should not allow ill-wishers among themselves.

The judiciary chief added that officials should have made necessary plans for the management of water.

He also called for efforts to allocate water to industries, agriculture and for drinking so that consumption is streamlined.

Ejei's comments comes as the central Iranian city of Isfahan was recently the scene of protests by residents over mismanagement regarding water supply in the Province of Isfahan. A small number of protesters however shouted anti-government chants which prompted police to disperse them.

Gov't Authorizes COVID-19 Booster Shot for All Adults

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's coronavirus task force has expanded eligibility for booster shots of COVID-19 vaccines to all adults as the country seeks to prevent a fresh surge in the number of infections.

A senior official in Iran's National Headquarters for Battling Coronavirus (NHBC) said on Sunday that members of the task force's scientific board had unanimously signed off on the expanded eligibility for a third coronavirus shot.

"How the program will be carried out and its timetable will be publicized by the health ministry's Center for Management of Contagious Diseases," said Hamid Reza Jama'ati, who serves as the secretary of the NHBC's scientific board.

Iran started its COVID-19 booster program for immunocompromised and frontline health workers last month. Health ministry figures published on Sunday showed that more than 950,000 shots have been delivered under the scheme.

However, authorities insist that expanding booster shots to all adults will prevent a new wave of infections now that more than half of Iran's population of over 85 million has been fully vaccinated against the disease.

The announcement on booster coronavirus vaccine comes amid reports that a new variant of the disease dubbed Omicron could trigger a new surge in infections around the world.

Jama'ati said that Omicron had started to spread in south of Africa mainly because of relatively poor vaccination rates in countries in the region as he insisted that booster dose program will be one of Iran's main defenses against the variant.

"These issues were discussed in the (NHBC's) scientific board and the need for higher vaccination coverage, observing hygiene protocols and injection of the booster shot were emphasized," he said.

Expanded vaccine coverage has helped Iran drastically reduce its coronavirus deaths from peaks of over 700 reported over the summer to below 100 these days.

Many Capacities to Expand Tehran-Damascus Economic Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - During his visit to Syria, the Iranian Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade said that there were a lot of potentials for the development of economic relations between the two countries.

Seyed Reza Fatemi Amin said: "During the trip to Syria, we will have good proposals in accordance with the capacities and conditions of the two countries, which is an important turning point for Tehran-Damascus relations."

Mohammad Samer Al-Khalil, Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade of Syria, said at the welcoming ceremony of Fatemi Amin: "The visit of the Iranian delegation to Syria will take place in the framework of continuing cooperation and solidarity between the two sides to strengthen relations in various fields."

He noted that the trip focuses on the economic aspects of trade, industry and investment.

The Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade also stated that the visit of the Iranian delegation is carried out while important meetings at the official level will be held and the second exhibition of Iranian products in Damascus where 164 Iranian companies participate from different sectors will inaugurate and Iranian experiences and capabilities in various fields will be transferred; all of this is what Syria needs.

He also said that these meetings will provide an opportunity to review the investment law as well as the most important investment opportunities in Syria.

Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade arrived in Syria on Sunday at the head of a high-level economic delegation and was welcomed by the country's Minister of Economy.



Iran, Syria Emphasize Boosting Sports Cooperation of Armed Forces

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The head of the physical training of the Syrian army and head of the physical training organization of the Iran Armed forces called for the promotion of sports cooperation between the armed forces of Iran and Syria.

Brigadier General Haitham, the head of the physical training of the Syrian army, who has traveled to Iran on Sunday, met with Brigadier General Jamshid Fouladi, head of the physical training organization of the Iran Armed forces.

In order to increase relations with Islamic countries, the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to establish sports relations with these countries, General Fouladi said in the meeting, stressing the need to promote sports cooperation between the armed forces of Iran and Syria.

"For this purpose, we are seeking to sign an MoU on sports cooperation between the armed forces of Iran and Syria", he said, adding that the agreement includes holding competitions, conducting educational activities such as training coaches and referees.

The Syrian military official also expressed satisfaction with Iran's long-standing friendly relations with Syria.

He also welcomed Fouladi's proposal to expand cooperation between the armed forces of Iran and Syria based on the agreements reached.

Iran-Turkey High Commission To Be Held in Erdogan's Visit

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian announced that the meeting of the Iran-Turkey High Commission will be held during Turkish President Erdogan's visit to Tehran.

Referring to the long-standing relationship between Iran and Turkey, Amir-Abdollahian in a tweet on Sunday wrote that the Iranian and Turkish presidents agreed to convene a High Commission meeting during Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Tehran.

He also said that the meeting of Ebrahim Raisi and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Turkmen capital on Sunday took place in a very friendly and cordial atmosphere, adding that during the meeting, they discussed the comprehensive development of relations and the removal of some obstacles.

The Iranian delegation headed by President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in Turkmenistan's capital of Ashgabat on Saturday night for the 15th ECO summit in the Turkmen capital.

On the sidelines of the ECO meeting, the Iranian president held several bilateral meetings with leaders of different regional countries in addition to delivering a speech at the summit in the morning of Sunday.

Putting emphasis on the development of cooperation and coordination between the two countries in bilateral and regional issues the Presidents of Iran and Turkey stressed taking advantage of all capacities for the comprehensive development of Tehran-Ankara relations.

Wealth Creation, Key to Solve Economic Problems

TEHRAN (IP) - Wealth creation should be improved in the country to solve economic problems, Iran's parliament speaker says.

Attending the joint meeting of the Parliament and senior executives of the Judiciary on Sunday, Mohammad-Bagher Qalibaf stated that all three branches of the government must be coordinated to achieve synergy and efficiency.

He named Iran's major problems as livelihood, water, class differences, and immigration.

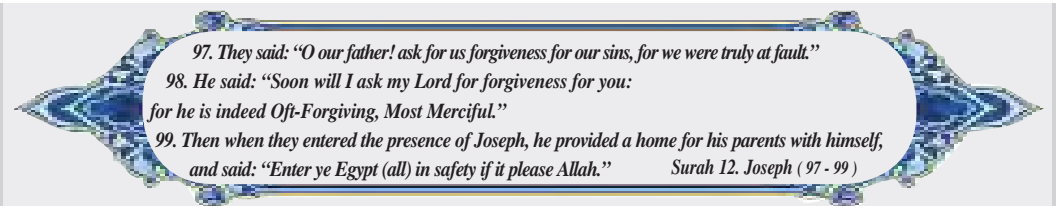
He noted that wealth creation should be carried out in the country to solve economic problems, adding that basic measures are also needed to move liquidity to production and investment.

He pointed out that fighting corruption should be pursued seriously, adding that one of the most important issues in economic plans is unproductive assets which should be turned into productive ones. "If corruption is not stopped at this stage, it will spread to the political sector and the election campaign," concluded the speaker.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:53
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:27
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:55



Gas Swap With Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan To Be Operational by Winter

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Oil Minister Javad Owji announced the implementation of the tripartite gas swap agreement from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan through Iran as of the beginning of winter.

Javad Owji said on Sunday evening after signing of a three-way gas contract: "Negotiations with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan on gas trade began about two months ago, which led to the signing of an annual swap agreement of 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan through Iran's Astara border."

Noting that gas flow from Turkmenistan to Iran had been suspended since December 2016, he said: "The Iran-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan three-way gas agreement will be operational as of the beginning of winter."

The oil minister stated that Iran's share of gas trade in the region is less than 2%, and said: "This contract will help provide winter fuel to the provinces of Khorasan Razavi, North and South, Golestan and Semnan."

The three-way gas swap agreement from Turkmenistan to the Republic of Azerbaijan from the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran was signed on Sunday in the presence of the Presidents of the Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Owji said based on a newly-signed swap agreement with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, Iran will receive approximately 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of gas annually from Turkmenistan and the Sarakhs region and deliver it from Astara to Azerbaijan.

He added: "Over the past month, we have had close talks with the Azerbaijani side and Turkmenistan on the transfer of gas from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan, which is in fact a gas swap, which fortunately led to this three-way agreement today."



Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have signed an agreement that allows the supply of natural gas from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan via Iran.

The trilateral gas transfer deal was signed on Sunday in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat in the presence of presidents of the three countries and on the sidelines of the ECO regional economic summit.

The report did not elaborate on where Iran will deliver the gas to Azerbaijan. However, the two countries have indicated in their previous talks that the gas could be supplied to Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijani exclave which is separated from the mainland by a slice of Armenia.

The deal comes after Iran agreed to pay its long-overdue debts to Turkmenistan for gas supplies it had received until 2017.

It also comes after Azerbaijan and Iran agreed to expand their economic and energy ties following a brief period of tensions that started in late summer over border and transportation issues.

The tripartite document was signed in the presence of Seyed Ebrahim Raisi and Ilham Aliyev, the presidents of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, respectively.

Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev had said during a visit to Iran on November 21 that there would be some good news in the very near future about increased energy cooperation between Tehran and Baku.

Iran Starts Appraisal of Areas Outside South Pars Phases for Hydrocarbons



TEHRAN (Shana) - The director of oil and gas engineering of Pars Oil and Gas Company said with the start of drilling an extension appraisal well in the northern part of the South Pars gas field, evaluation of the potential capacity of the areas outside the current blocks of the field entered the implementation phase.

According to Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), Ali Akbar Majed, referring to the start of drilling operations for the SP-16 extension appraisal well on the north side of the South Pars gas field, said POGC has started drilling the well to determine the expansion of the South Pars gas field in its north and evaluate the potential capacity of the uncharted parts of the field by hiring the Iranian Offshore Engineering and Construction Company.

He noted that one of the solutions considered in the master plan to maintain gas production in the South Pars joint field is evaluation and location of suitable hydrocarbon reserves, and said: "the SP-16 well, whose appraisal objectives and evaluation has been determined in cooperation with the exploration department of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), is the first of four wells planned for drilling and evaluation of areas outside the current blocks of the field."

Modern Home-Made Customs Equipment, Systems Unveiled

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran unveiled a series of domestically produced smart customs systems and equipment on Monday in a ceremony attended by the country's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi and the Vice President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari, IRIB reported.

As reported, the unveiled equipment includes two container X-ray machines that have been indigenized by the experts at the Ministry of Defense in collaboration with knowledge-based companies and will be used in Shahid Rajaei Port in southern Hormozgan Province and Incheh-Boroun port in northern Golestan province.

With the mentioned X-Ray devices going operational, the total number of X-ray machines at the country's borders reaches 15.

Iran, Tajikistan Discuss Cultural Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian envoy to Dushanbe met with the head of Tajikistan's language and terminology committee to discuss expansion of cooperation in the field of Iranian and Tajik culture and language.

Mohammad Taghi Saberi, Ambassador of Iran to Tajikistan announced on his Instagram account that he had met and held talks with the head of Tajikistan's language and terminology committee.

The implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between Tajikistan's language and terminology committee and the Academy of Persian Language and Literature and the expansion of cooperation in the field of Iranian and Tajik culture and language were discussed in the meeting, he said.



Last week, the Iranian Ambassador to Tajikistan had met with the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan, Ms. Zulfiya Davlatzoda in the Tajik capital Dushanbe to discuss promoting ties in the fields of art and culture.

According to him, in the meeting, grounds for expansion of cultural and artistic relations and cooperation between the

two countries, both culture and language, were reviewed.

Yesterday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi also met and held talks with his Tajik counterpart on the sidelines of the 15th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Summit in Ashgabat.

The two sides discuss trade, cultural and economic relations between Iran and Tajikistan.

Iran Electricity Exports to Iraq Cut

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iraqi government has announced a complete halt of Iran's electricity exports and said a sharp reduction in gas shipments from Iran continues.

Ahmed Musa, spokesman for the Iraqi ministry of electricity, told Baghdad's Al-Youm newspaper on Sunday that Iran would have to deliver 50 million cubic meters of gas per day, but that number has already fallen to 8 million cubic meters.

The drop in gas exports to Iraq was also announced this September, and Iraqi officials had announced diplomatic consultations to resolve the issue. Much of the problem with Iran's electricity and gas exports to Iraq goes back to how electricity and gas are paid, and over the past three years it has faced complexity due to sanctions.

Iraq has received temporary sanctions waivers from the U.S. government for importing electricity and gas from Iran, providing one-third of the energy it needs through purchasing electricity from Iran and importing gas for its power plants, but due to sanctions on Iranian banks and oil and gas industries, a large portion of the electricity and gas money purchased from Iran has not been paid.

Under U.S. sanctions, Iraq deposits gas money delivered from Iran to an account at the Iraqi Tejarat Bank, and the Islamic Republic is only able to buy humanitarian goods from Iraq itself from these sources.

Iraqi government officials have previously explained that it is possible to pay Iran's debt with dinars, but since Iran wants to receive its debt in dollars, it is impossible to transfer money in light of U.S. sanctions.



MAPNA Group, Outcome of Endeavors And Prudence of Elites in the Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The new line of directional solidification and single crystal casting of MAPNA Turbine Blade Engineering and Manufacturing Company (PARTO) for producing the blades of Class F turbines came on stream in presence of the energy minister.



With the launch of this line, Iran became self-sufficient in producing the mentioned parts and at the same time, the static stimulation system (MAPEX) Class F for the 470 megavolt ampere generators was exploited in the MAPNA Electric, Control Engineering and Manufacturing (MECO).

This system for the first time in the MAPNA Group was indigenized with reliance on domestic knowledge while in the past, these systems were provided by the European companies.

The line came on operation on November 28 in the presence of Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian and his entourage.

Mehrabian visited the production line while he was being accompanied by the CEO of MAPNA Group Mr. Abbas Aliabadi. The minister during his visit got familiar with the achievements and field of activities of the group.

Mehrabian also visited the research and development centers and laboratories of the group and got familiar with the advanced technologies being utilized in the company.

On the sidelines of the visit and speaking to reporters, Mehrabian termed MAPNA Group a giant industrial complex and a national asset which is the outcome of prudence, endeavors and thought of thousands of Iranian elites during the past years who used their capabilities, determination and knowledge for its launch.

He added today everybody sees production of many industrial productions in different fields especially in the national energy industry and hailed the growth of MAPNA Group in the economic fields despite several ups and downs.

Mehrabian also pointed to the high quality of products of MAPNA Group and stipulated that some products of MAPNA are able to compete with their foreign like rivals.

Gas Transmission Hits Record High

TEHRAN (MNA) - Gas transmission in Iran hit a new record of over 800 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d) on November 21, Iranian Gas Transmission Company (IGTC)'s Managing Director Mehdi Jamshidi Dana announced.

The official said that due to the special position of the IGTC and the existence of potential capacities, the development of the gas transmission network is on the new agenda of this company.

Referring to the beginning of the cold days of the year and the increase in gas consumption, Jamshidi Dana also stressed the need for more effort and ability of employees to transfer this clean, safe and sustainable energy.

In early October, Head of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Majid Chegeni said that over 1,700 kilometers of high-pressure gas pipelines are currently under construction across the country.

Speaking in a meeting with Bahram Salavati, the head of the Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company (IGEDC), Chegeni said: "The implementation of more than 1700 kilometers of high-pressure transmission lines including Bidboland - Ahvaz, Qom - Mohammadieh - Parchin, Rasht - Chelvand, Laft - Gourzin - Bandar Abbas and Bidboland - Gachsaran shows NIGC's determination for completing underway projects on schedule."

"Implementation of projects on time, in accordance with the current standards and regulations of the Oil Ministry, will lead to further development of the country's gas industry," he added.

The official noted that his company has put strengthening the gas infrastructure on the agenda as one of its main priorities of the company in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21).

Operating the largest natural gas network in West Asia, NIGC continues to expand this network into the country's most remote areas so that currently over 95 percent of the country's population enjoys natural gas through this huge network.

Overall, about 98.4 percent of the country's urban population is currently enjoying natural gas through the gas network while the figure stands at 84 percent for the rural population, the report showed.

Thousands Protest Against Czech COVID Measures

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - Several thousand people protested in Prague against anti-coronavirus restrictions on Sunday as many Czech hospitals halted non-urgent procedures in the face of one of the world's fastest rates of new infections.

Gathered in a park overlooking the Czech capital's centre, protesters waved national flags and carried signs with slogans such as: "Get vaccinated? Over your dead bodies".

The outgoing government toughened measures on Thursday, including a ban on Christmas markets, which was one of the main themes at Sunday's rally.



7.5-Magnitude Earthquake Shakes North Peru

LIMA (Dispatches) - A 7.5-magnitude earthquake struck northern Peru on Sunday, destroying buildings including a church tower, injuring at least 10 people and sending shock waves across the region.

The strong quake hit at 5:52 am (1052 GMT) at a depth of 131 kilometers (81 miles), according to the Geophysical Institute of Peru.

Civil Defense authorities said at least 10 people were injured, while several houses were destroyed.

The quake also caused damage in neighboring Ecuador.



New Covid Variant Shuts Borders Across the Globe



THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - A new, heavily mutated Covid-19 variant spread across the globe on Sunday, shutting borders and renewing curbs as the EU chief said governments faced a "race against time" to understand the strain.

Indonesia announced similar entry restrictions on Sunday and Angola became the first southern African country to suspend all flights from its regional neighbours Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa.

Dubbed Omicron, the strain has cast doubt on global efforts to battle the pandemic because of fears that it is highly infectious, forcing countries to reimpose measures many had hoped were a thing of the past.

"We know we are now in a race against time," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said, adding that vaccine manufacturers needed two to three weeks "to get a full picture of the quality of the mutations".

Dutch health authorities said they had identified at least 13 cases of Omicron among 61 quarantined passengers who tested positive for coronavirus after arriving from South Africa.

"The investigation has not yet been completed. The new variant may be found in more test samples," the National Institute for Public Health warned.

Despite the alarm, in Austria tens of thousands rallied to protest against the government's introduction of compulsory vaccination -- the first EU country to do so.

Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said it was "a minor interference" compared to the alternative for a country with one of the lowest vaccination rates in Western Europe.

With many European nations, including Germany and France, already bringing back curbs to counter surges in infections, Swiss voters firmly backed a proposed Covid pass law in a referendum on Sunday.

In Britain, Health Secretary Avid Javid said new Covid rules will be enforced from Tuesday.

Mask-wearing will again be mandatory in shops and on public transport in England. And all arriving passengers will have to take a PCR test and self-isolate until negative.

As scientists race to determine the level of threat posed by the new strain -- particularly whether it can evade existing vaccines -- a South African doctor said dozens of her patients suspected of Omicron infection had only shown mild symptoms such as fatigue.

Angelique Coetzee, chair of the South African Medical Association, who alerted health officials to a "clinical picture that doesn't fit Delta", told AFP she had seen 30 patients over the past 10 days who tested positive for Covid-19.

They had fully recovered without hospitalization.

Coetzee said it was unfortunate that Omicron had been hyped as "this extremely dangerous virus variant" when its virulence was still unknown.

EU, NATO Vow Action Against Hybrid Threats on Baltic Visit

VILNIUS (Dispatches) - EU and NATO leaders on Sunday vowed to counter "hybrid threats" on visits to Lithuania and Latvia dominated by the Belarus migrant crisis and Russia's military build-up near Ukraine.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also repeated his call on Russia to "de-escalate" its military build-up on the border with Ukraine and warned of "consequences" if it used force.

The visit by Stoltenberg and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen comes ahead of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers including U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Latvia this week.

Stoltenberg and von der Leyen both accused Belarus of orchestrating the migrant crisis on its border as a "hybrid" threat against the European Union -- a charge that the regime has denied.

A hybrid threat is a security challenge combining traditional military means and non-military tactics such as disinformation.

"To respond to such events, it is important that the European Union and NATO work hand in hand," von der Leyen said at a joint news conference with Stoltenberg and Lithuanian leaders in Vilnius.

Stoltenberg said: "We discussed how we could step up our joint work between NATO and the EU".

Von der Leyen also said the EU had decided to triple to 200 million euros (\$226 million) its funding for border management in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland for 2021 and 2022.

She said the money would go on patrol vehicles and electronic surveillance, including drones.

Thousands of migrants -- mostly from the Middle East -- have crossed or tried to cross the Belarus border in recent months into the eastern members of the EU and NATO: Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

Referring to the situation on the Belarus border, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda said that "if the security situation gets even worse, we do not rule out consultations under NATO's Article 4".

Under the article in NATO's founding treaty, any member can convene a meeting of the alliance to consult when it feels its security threatened.

Poland has also said it may invoke this article.



Taiwan Scrambles to See Off Chinese Air Force

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's air force scrambled again to warn away 27 Chinese aircraft that entered its air defense zone, Taiwan's defense ministry said, the latest increase in tensions across the Taiwan Strait as China's president met his top generals.

Chinese-claimed Taiwan has complained for a year or more of repeated missions by China's air force near the democratically governed island, often in the southwestern part of its air defence identification zone, or ADIZ, close to the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands. Taiwan calls China's repeated nearby military activities "grey zone" warfare, designed to both wear out Taiwan's forces by making them repeatedly scramble, and also to test Taiwan's responses.

Over a four-day period beginning on Oct. 1, when China marked its national day, Taiwan said that nearly 150 PLA military aircraft entered its ADIZ, not territorial air space but a broader area Taiwan monitors and patrols that acts to give it more time to respond to any threats.

The latest Chinese mission included 18 fighter jets plus five nuclear-capable H-6 bombers, as well as, unusually, a Y-20 aerial refuelling aircraft, the Taiwan ministry said.

The bombers and six of the fighters flew to the south of Taiwan into the Bashi Channel which separates the island from the Philippines, then out into the Pacific before heading back to China, according to a map the ministry provided.

Those aircraft were accompanied by the refueling aircraft, suggesting China refueled the shorter-ranged fighters inflight, a skill that the country's air force is still working to hone to enable it to project power further from China's shores.

Taiwan sent combat aircraft to warn away the Chinese aircraft, while missile systems were deployed to monitor them, the ministry said.

There was no immediate comment from China, which has in the past said such moves were drills aimed at protecting the country's sovereignty. However, Chinese state media reported that President Xi Jinping had held a three-day meeting which ended on Sunday with the country's top officers to discuss how further to strengthen the armed forces through talent cultivation.

Honduras Votes to Pick New President

TEGUCIGALPA (Dispatches) - Hondurans headed to the polls to pick a new president, with leftist candidate Xiomara Castro hoping to oust the right-wing National Party, whose 12-year rule has been beset by graft scandals, chronic unemployment and waves of fleeing migrants.

If she wins, Castro would become the country's first woman president and would mark the left's return to power for the first time since her husband former President Manuel Zelaya was deposed in a 2009 coup.

She has gained favor from voters for her efforts to consolidate opposition to outgoing President Juan Orlando Hernandez, who has denied accusations of having ties to powerful gangs, among other corruption scandals. Recent voter surveys reinforced her status as favorite to win.

The election is the latest political flashpoint in Central America, a major source of U.S.-bound migrants and key transit point for drug trafficking, and where concerns over increasingly authoritarian governments have grown.

Castro's main rival is the National Party's Nasry Asfura, a wealthy businessman and two-term mayor of the capital Tegucigalpa who has tried to distance himself from the unpopular incumbent.

Hernandez's disputed 2017 reelection, and its ugly aftermath, looms large over Sunday's vote.

Wide-spread reports of irregularities provoked deadly protests claiming the lives of over two dozen people, but Hernandez's election win was ultimately rubber-stamped by allies on the electoral council. Days later, it was vowed for by the government of then-U.S. President Donald Trump.

A large number of national and international election observers are set to monitor Sunday's voting, including an 80-person delegation from the Washington-based Organization of American States led by former Costa Rican President Luis Guillermo Solis.

"The voice of the Honduran people must be respected and the process must not lead to acts of violence," Solis told Reuters.

Some 5.2 million Hondurans are eligible to vote.

The pre-election tension was showing in some Tegucigalpa neighborhoods late Saturday, as some businesses boarded up storefront windows, and at least two auto dealerships located in an area near the president's offices had emptied their lots of cars. The neighborhood has been the scene of raucous protests in the past.

Since primary elections in March, political violence has already claimed 31 lives, including local candidates and activists across all three major parties: Castro's Libre Party, the National Party, as well as the centrist Liberal Party.



Swiss Voters Back Covid Pass Law

GENEVA (Dispatches)

- Swiss voters firmly backed the law behind the country's Covid pass in a referendum Sunday, following a tense campaign marked by unprecedented levels of hostility.

The law provides the legal basis for the so-called Covid certificate to indicate that a person has been vaccinated or has recovered from the disease.

Opponents claimed the certificate, which has been required since September for access to restaurants and other indoor spaces and activities, is creating an "apartheid" system.

Final results showed 62 percent supported the law in a contest that saw voters surge to fill in their ballots.

The 65 percent turnout was the fourth-highest since women were granted the vote in 1971, in a country where the average referendum turnout is 46 percent.

A majority voted against the law in just two of the 26 Swiss cantons, with the highest support levels registered in Basel City and Zurich.

The referendum came as the discovery of the new Covid-19 variant of concern Omicron shook countries and markets around the world.

The vote also came with the numbers of new Covid cases in Switzerland more than seven times higher than in mid-October.

Under Switzerland's direct democracy system, votes are typically held four times a year on a range of subjects. Citizens can propose new initiatives, or trigger referendums on government policy by gathering enough signatures, as happened on the Covid certificate law.

As in much of Europe, Switzerland has seen growing anger over restrictions aimed at reining in the pandemic, and pressure to get vaccinated.

But in a country where the regular votes normally take place in a climate of civility and measured debate, the soaring tensions around the Covid law vote came as a shock.

Police upped security around several politicians who have faced a flood of insults and even death threats, including Health Minister Alain Berset.



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5bdrs, S/p
S, J, yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$2400)
Zaferanieh
190sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
marble fl, F.F

Kamranieh Apts
(\$2000) 2bdrs, 160sq.m
(\$3000) 3bdrs, 200sq.m
with S/pool, S, J, & F.F

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Saudi Arabia's Net Foreign Assets Decline 3.3% in Oct.

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Net foreign assets held by the Saudi Central Bank went down by a monthly rate of 3.3 percent to reach SR1.63 trillion (\$433 billion) in October, according to newly released data by SAMA.

The central bank's net foreign assets declined by 2 percent compared to last year's October. Commercial banks' net foreign assets also decreased to SR47.9 billion in October down from SR59.8 billion in the previous month.

The banks' net foreign assets nearly halved in value compared to the same month a year ago.



Demand for Manpower Surges As Qatar's Economy Reopens

DOHA (Dispatches) - With economic activity in the country gaining momentum, the demand for manpower has soared. The requirement for staff from the companies is so high that manpower agencies in the country are unable to fulfil the demand. The companies are more interested in hiring local talent instead of getting people from abroad.

"Everyday we are getting minimum 7-8 emails about requirements. Demand for manpower is high from retail companies, hotels, restaurants and education. Demand is also coming from contracting companies for blue-collared jobs, like carpenters, electricians etc," Abdulla Usman Sait, Managing Director of KKK&Z International- a manpower providing company- told The Peninsula.

"Now the market is opening up and companies have started expanding their activities and they need more people to meet their expansion plans," said Abdulla. KKK&Z International provide manpower to many major companies including Ali Bin Ali, Huawei, Vivo, Microsoft, Apple, Vodafone Panasonic, Dell and many gaming brands.

With the reopening of economy, many national and international events are also planned. In the last two months, Qatar has organised many high profile events and conferences including Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix, Hospitality Qatar, Cityscape and Project Qatar. It is going to be a busy season going forward as many such big events are lined-up. Such events will keep the demand for manpower high in the coming months.

"The start of mega events is also one of the major factors for driving up the demand for manpower. Also, companies have begun to prepare for the upcoming football world cup," said Abdulla. "The demand is higher for local talent and companies prefer a local hire compared to bringing someone from abroad," he added.

With FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 just a year away, companies are preparing for these mega-events. They have started hiring employees considering that the activities related to the world cup will increase the economic activities in Qatar.

Companies in the tourism and hospitality sectors are looking to increase the headcount. "Earlier the demand for manpower was so high that if someone had asked me to bring 10 kilograms of gold, I could have done it easily but if someone had asked to bring even two people it was very difficult to do. But, now the situation is much better as now quarantine rules have eased which has enabled manpower companies to bring people from abroad," said Abdulla.

Easing of quarantine rule has benefitted manpower companies in Qatar as it has lowered the cost of bringing people from outside.

German Retail Sees Slow Christmas Season Start

BERLIN (Dispatches) - A surge in coronavirus cases in Germany has led to a disappointing start to the Christmas season for retailers in Europe's biggest economy, the sector body said on Sunday.

A survey by the HDE retail association showed that only 20% of the 350 companies asked were satisfied with Christmas sales so far. November and December are normally the strongest months of the year for retailers.

"The retail sector managed to defy increasingly difficult conditions, including higher inflation, rising infection numbers and supply bottlenecks until November," said HDE Managing Director Stefan Genth.

"However, the consequences of the dramatic worsening of the coronavirus crisis have hit the retail trade in the past week," he added.

Controls in shops, such as checks of vaccination certificates, were putting customers off, said Genth, adding that he wanted fewer restrictions in shops as masks and air filters were known to be effective.

Earlier this month, the HDE said it expected Christmas sales to rise 2% from last year to 111.7 billion euros (\$126.44 billion).

Germany is struggling to contain a fourth wave of the coronavirus with 44,401 new cases registered on Sunday, according to the Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases.

Two confirmed cases of the omicron variant have been detected in southern Germany and more than 100,000 people have died due to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic in Germany.

Lebanese Central Bank Blames Google, Facebook as Currency Hits All-Time Low

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's central bank, the Banque du Liban, took aim at tech giants Google and Facebook as the country's currency hit a new record low on the black market, plunging to 25,000 Lebanese pounds against one U.S. dollar.

This is nearly 17 times less than the official rate set by the bank, which is 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

The Banque du Liban said that currency

trading apps advertising black market exchange rates for the Lebanese pound were behind the latest fall in the national currency's value, and blamed Google and Facebook for not shutting them down.

"Many of [the currency trading apps] are based outside Lebanon and the Banque du Liban has called on Internet companies to ban these apps from their networks," its statement said.

"The Banque du Liban will monitor this situation externally and will hold companies such as Google, Facebook, and others to account for the harm these apps have caused Lebanon," the statement warned.

The bank called on the tech companies to "only publish the official rate", describing the currency trading apps as "illegal" and saying that "trading and political interests were behind them".

Lebanon is currently suffering from multiple economic, political, and financial crises. The World Bank has said that that the situation in the country is unprecedented, describing Lebanon's economic crisis as the worst in the world since 1850.

Around 80 percent of the country's population is now living in poverty as a result.

Riad Salameh, who has been governor of the Banque du Liban since 1993, is currently under investigation for corruption in Luxembourg and Switzerland.

He was previously praised for his monetary policies but is now accused of running a Ponzi scheme which led to the Lebanese pound's dramatic collapse in 2019.

This is not the first time that Lebanese authorities have blamed Internet apps for the plunging value of the Lebanese pound.

In March this year, Lebanese judicial authorities requested the help of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to help shut down currency trading apps advertising the black market rate.

Bangladesh Determined to Create Investment-Friendly Environment

DHAKA (Dispatches) - The Awami League government focuses on economic diplomacy and is determined to provide all kinds of policy support, including infrastructural assistance, in creating an investment-friendly environment in Bangladesh, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"We're working to ensure bilateral and regional priority trade treaties, open trade treaties and coordinated economic partnership treaties," Hasina said during the inauguration of the International Investment Summit 2021 via videoconferencing from the Ganabhaban.

Mentioning the preferential trade agreement with Bhutan, Hasina said Bangladesh is now enjoying one-way duty-free exports to 38 countries. Also, it has ongoing contracts with 36 countries to avoid double taxation. Bangladesh is also working with various trade blocs.

As many as 2,332 participants from 15 countries, including the U.S., the UK, China, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Malaysia, have signed up for the conference.

Bangladesh has identified a series of sectors as the potential areas of investment: infrastructure, capital market, financial service, information technology, electronics, leather industry, automatic and light engineering, agricultural products, food processing, health service, medicine, jute, textile and the blue-economy. "We believe that the investors will get to know in detail about the potential of these sectors through the summit. New markets will open up for Bangladeshi products and it will be able to draw the expected investment."

Hasina thanked the organisers for holding the summit at a time when Bangladesh is celebrating the Mujib Barsha and the golden jubilee of its independence. She highlighted the steps taken by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to ensure the rights of the oppressed and the development of a post-independence Bangladesh.

Investment, development of infrastructure and economic diplomacy to propel the growth were some of the points in the Awami League election manifesto when it won the election in 1996, she said.

"The expanded investment stood at \$816 million in fiscal 2000-2001, while it was only \$286 million during the BNP rule in fiscal 1995-96. We pushed up power generation to 4,300 MW in 2000-2001 from 1,600 MW in 1995-96."

Hasina said her administration opened the private sector and constructed the Padma Bridge. "We established a communication network in Bangladesh and also an IT village and high-tech parks aiming to develop our export business. Unfortunately, Bangladesh had a chance to get connected to the submarine cable and fibre optics but BNP, the party in power at the time, refused it," she said.

Laos Hopes for Economic Boost From Chinese-Built Railway



BANGKOK (Dispatches) - A new \$6 billion Chinese-built railway line opens in Laos this week, bringing hopes of an economic boost to the reclusive nation, but experts are questioning the benefits of a project that has seen thousands of farmers evicted from their land.

The 414-kilometre (260-mile) route, due to open on December 3, took five years to construct under China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, which funds infrastructure projects aimed at increasing Beijing's clout globally. Struggling strawberry farmer Anouphon Phomhacsar is hoping the new railway will get his business back on track.

His farm usually produces up to two tonnes of the red heart-shaped fruits a year, but the pandemic has hit the 2021 harvest hard.

It currently takes Phomhacsar three to four hours to send his strawberries to Vientiane by road, but he hopes the new railway will cut this delivery time in half.

And he says it will also be easier for tourists to travel to camp under the stars and pick berries.

"In the future, foreign tourists coming to the farm could be in the tens of thousands," he told AFP.

The train route will connect the Chinese city of Kunming to the Laos capital, with grand plans for high-speed rail to ultimately snake down through Thailand and Malaysia to Singapore.

Infrastructure-poor Laos, a reclusive communist-run country of 7.2 million people, previously had only four kilometers of railway tracks.

But now sleek red, blue and white bullet trains will speed along the new line at up to 160 kmh (100 mph), passing through 75 tunnels and across 167 bridges, stopping at 10 passenger stations.

Despite registering only dozens of Covid cases until April, Laos' economy took a pandemic battering -- economic growth declined to 0.4 percent in 2020, the lowest level in three decades, according to the World Bank.

Chinese Firm to Relocate High-Tech Industrial Units to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Chinese firm Dongguan HAOTIAN Testing Equipment has expressed willingness to relocate their industrial units of high-tech testing equipment to Pakistan in the second phase of industrialization under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), said its chairman.

Chinese Company the Dongguan HAOTIAN Testing Equipment Co Ltd would set up a testing equipment plants in Pakistan and would transfer high-tech technology in this sector, said Yucheng Yang, Chairman of DHTE group.

He further said that Pakistan and China are brother countries. We plan to set up the factories in Pakistan in very near future, and comprehensively carry out the corresponding technical personnel training so that more manufacturing fields can access our products, and shorten the technological gap in Pakistan.

Yucheng, Chairman of the Dongguan HAOTIAN Testing Equipment Co Ltd further said that Pakistan is a friendly country and the Pakistani government has been dedicated to providing more facilities for Chinese enterprises, which is significant for promoting more Chinese industries to Pakistan.

In his exclusive interview, he introduced his company that Dongguan HAOTIAN Testing Equipment Co Ltd, established in 2013, and located in the Chang Ping town, Dongguan city, Guangdong, is a professional commitment to the world's latest technology reliability test skill research and climate environment simulation equipment's research and development, manufacturing, and sales of science and technology innovation national high-tech enterprise.



Covers an area of 8,000 square meters, which the dormitory and canteen cover an area of 1,000 square meters, the leisure place covers an area of 500 square meters, the warehouse covers 600 square meters, office building covers the 2,200 square meters, production factory has 4,500 square meters practical area.

Currently, there are about 200 employees, including 80 people with bachelor's degrees and above, and more than 120 staff with a college degree or above accounting for 50 percent of the employees.

“The Recess” Wins Best Short Fiction Film Award at IPSMF

TEHRAN (IRNA) - “The Recess”, acclaimed movie by Iranian Director Navid Nikkhah Azad receives the Best Short Fiction Film Award at IPSMF (International Photography and Short Movie Festival) in Indonesia. “The Recess” marked its 61st international appearance in IPSMF (International Photography and Short Movie Festival) in Indonesia. The 5th edition of the IPSMF (International Photography and Short Movie Festival) wrapped up on November 27 in a virtual closing ceremony. The prestigious three-hour-long closing ceremony was hosted on Zoom. The full ceremony went live on the IPSMF channel on YouTube.



Japan to Get World's First Operational Dual-Mode Bus and Rail Vehicle



holding the retractable wheels. Earlier this month a technical panel at the ministry reviewed the test results using the upgraded parts and gave the green light for the vehicle to go into operation.

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The world’s first operational dual-mode vehicle capable of running on roads and railway tracks is set to enter service next month in the Shikoku region. Asa Seaside Railway Corp. in Tokushima Prefecture said it will roll out the DMV vehicles on Dec. 25, having cleared safety checks by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. The vehicles will run on a 50-kilometer course connecting the town of Kaiyo in Tokushima Prefecture and the city of Muroto in Kochi Prefecture, of which 10 km will be on a railway track. Three will be in operation, each with a capacity of 23 passengers and crew. The DMV is a diesel-powered bus that has been fitted with an extra set of wheels on the undercarriage, which can be deployed in about 15 seconds to make it capable of traveling on railway tracks. The Tokushima Prefectural Government, which has a 35% stake in Asa Seaside Railway, said it hopes the DMV will become a tourist draw and help boost the local economy, which, like much of Japan, has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. The company is also 10% owned by the Kochi Prefectural Government. The vehicles may also be useful in natural disasters such as earthquakes, which may leave sections of roads or railway tracks unusable. The DMV is lighter than a traditional train, which, according to the company, means it requires less fuel and is easier to maintain. Hokkaido Railway Co. developed its own version in 2004 but did not bring it into operation, in part due to financial difficulties. Asa Seaside Railway had initially planned for the DMV to enter service in time for this summer’s Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics but had to push back those plans after the transport ministry instructed it in June to reinforce welding on the arm

Sony and Samsung’s Zero-Sum Rivalry May Be Recast in the Metaverse



LONDON (FT) - In every great historical rivalry — from military commanders and sporting legends to fizzy drinks and R&B divas — the desire for the rival’s destruction usually conceals a terrible throb of awe. And so, for many hotly-contested years, it was with Sony and Samsung — two of the world’s greatest tech companies, bruisingly and brilliantly entwined in their war for dominance. Since then, their strategies and skills (one currently has its eye on Indian Premier League cricket, the other on a \$17bn Texan chip plant) have diverged. But the pair, say investors, also look destined to meet again — in the metaverse. The transformation of Samsung, South Korea’s most valuable company, from manufacturer of humdrum products in the early 1990s to a peerless consumer electronics titan in memory chips, batteries, mobile phones and TVs a decade later was a determined emulation of the rise of its Japanese nemesis. When the value of Samsung’s brand (as calculated by Interbrand) overtook Sony’s in 2005, the symbolism could hardly have been more seismic. Even Sony’s top executives later acknowledged in private that a crucial TV panel joint venture between the two had provided the stage on which it had been expertly outmanoeuvred. But, as it turned out, that humiliation was also the moment that the rivalry began to lose its meaning — not just because the rest of the tech universe was rapidly moving beyond that type of one-on-one rivalry, but because the two companies themselves were in flux. Samsung, whose experiments with content and software had never really worked, was realising that its future lay in producing the hardware that would both underpin and host successive generations of the consumer tech revolution. Sony, after some exceptionally painful years as a corporate abattoir for sacred cows, began to see that its co-founder Akio Morita’s vision of convergence and control of content was now more attainable than ever in its history. In recent weeks and months, the strategic gulf between Samsung and Sony has been even more crisply defined — even if the execution in both cases has left some puzzled about what might happen next. Last week Samsung announced the US city of Taylor as the location for its most advanced semiconductor facility. The investment (Samsung’s largest ever in the US) represented another decisive bet by the company on tech hardware and a product for which the world’s appetite seems insatiable. The news followed the company’s announcement of a \$206bn, three-year investment plan. Yet, vast though that commitment is, Samsung remains a company with a great deal more to spend and, as yet, little indication of what it has in mind. Its third generation heir, Lee Jae-yong, is freshly emerged from prison, and expected to unleash some of the M&A hunger that grew during his absence. The most likely target, say analysts, will be in non-memory chips and further commitment to hardware.

Iraq Faces Uphill Struggle to Reach New Oil Production Target

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - An uncertain future for fossil fuels and long-standing political turmoil have not deterred Iraq from declaring lofty ambitions to nearly double its crude output capacity to 8 million b/d by 2027. But the cash-strapped country would require unprecedented levels of outside investment at a time when many international oil companies, already unimpressed with the fiscal terms Iraq has offered for years, are seeking to de-risk their portfolios. Iraq would need funds not only to boost drilling, but also to massively expand its surface production facilities and export infrastructure, and drastically reduce the vast associated gas flaring that has made it one of the most polluting oil producing countries. In the north, the Kurdistan Regional Government’s chronic cash flow shortages and budget disputes with the federal government in Baghdad remain major obstacles to growing its oil sector. It adds up to significant doubt over the likelihood Iraq can hit its declared production target. “I do not think the 8 million b/d is technically real or achievable,” said Hussain al-Chalabi, a London-based Iraqi oil consultant who in 2020 was nominated to become the country’s oil minister before the fledgling government of Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Allawi collapsed. By now, Iraq was supposed to be pumping more than 9 million b/d, according to its National Energy Strategic Plan adopted in 2013, which would have put it in the same league as oil giants the US, Russia and fellow OPEC member Saudi Arabia. But years of insurgency by the Islamic State ravaged its economy and destabilized its political system. Then the coronavirus pandemic crashed oil prices, prompting OPEC and its allies to institute historic production cuts in 2020, which have been gradually unwound. Iraqi crude production, including from the semiautonomous Kurdish region, was 4.17 million b/d in October, according to the latest S&P Global Platts survey of OPEC output. Platts Analytics projects that Iraq’s crude production capacity, not including condensate and NGLs, will reach just 4.72 million b/d in 2027, and eventually rise to 5.74 million b/d by 2040 – solid growth, but nowhere near the 8 million b/d target announced by oil minister Ihsan Ismael in October. Some Iraqi analysts told Platts they believe the country could achieve 6 million b/d by 2027, but that would be highly dependent on prevailing policies, OPEC+ quotas and other potential constraints. The ministry has recently signed several deals to boost output, notably a \$27 billion contract with TotalEnergies that includes raising production at the Ratawi oil field from 85,000 b/d to 210,000 b/d by 2027. Iraq also has ongoing drilling contracts at its Rumaila, Majnoon, Dhi-Qar and Zubair oil fields, and just inked another agreement for 96 new wells at West Qurna-1. Ismael said Nov. 19 that West Qurna-2, operated by Lukoil, would reach peak production of 800,000 b/d by 2027, doubling its current output. Lukoil has also submitted a preliminary development proposal for the Eridu field, which may yield 250,000 b/d at peak. New surface production facilities are being built in Majnoon and Zubair, but no other similar projects are in the works for other fields. However, at Rumaila, existing infrastructure would allow the field to produce 150,000 b/d more than its current capacity of 1.45 million b/d. To raise substantial new investment, Iraq would need to markedly improve its fiscal terms, observers say. The ministry has typically relied on technical service contracts with foreign operators, such as ExxonMobil, BP and Shell. But IOCs largely prefer production sharing contracts that would allow them to count reserves on their balance sheets and boost their valuations. Despite holding some of the cheapest reserves to develop, Iraq has generated lukewarm interest in its most recent bidding rounds over the past decade. Already, Iraq has seen Shell exit its investment in Majnoon, while ExxonMobil has filed for arbitration to sell off its share in West Qurna-1 against the wishes of the oil ministry, and BP spun off its Rumaila operations into a new subsidiary under its energy transition strategy. Lukoil also sought to offload its West Qurna-2 stake before withdrawing its request in July. Beyond the fiscal terms, many western oil companies are facing regulatory and shareholder pressure to green their holdings. “IOCs are less attracted to new investment in their oil sector, and they are trying to abide by sustainable development goals and restructuring their portfolios,” Chalabi said. A major environmental concern is gas flaring. Iraq burned 17.37 Bcm of associated gas in 2020, the second highest globally behind Russia, according to the World Bank. Iraq is planning to spend \$3 billion annually to eliminate flaring by 2025, but increasing crude production to 8 million b/d would substantially increase volumes of associated gas, requiring more investment in capture and treatment plants that could eat into profits from higher crude sales. In the Kurdish region, the KRG, fiscally overspent after being on the front lines of the battle against the IS, has frequently fallen behind in payments to IOCs, and the budget struggles have reduced the attractiveness of oil development, analysts say. KRG-controlled production has been about 470,000 b/d in recent months, according to Platts estimates, down from a peak of roughly 600,000 to 650,000 b/d in 2017 before a political row between Erbil and Baghdad led to the federal government’s seizure of the Avanah Dome and Bai Hassan field. Shwan Zulal, a London-based consultant specializing in the Kurdistan region, said the risky investment climate there makes the prospects of rapidly raising crude production difficult. “You have to attract people to invest,” he said. “There are proven reserves. The capacity is there. It’s possible, but the politics of producing more oil are difficult.”

Iran Lashes Out...

FROM PAGE 1

After the elapse of about three decades of Cold War, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has adapted itself to the new conditions and challenges of the world, he emphasized. The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the NAM’s move to establish its own parliamentary network could use the capacity of member states’ parliaments as a powerful complement to achieve objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement within the framework of the UN Charter, Nikzad added. Elsewhere in his remarks, he lashed out at the US economic terrorism and emphasized that economic terrorism in the form of illegal and extraterritorial sanctions against freedom-seeking nations is morally wrong and challenges the rule of law at the international level unjustifiably. There is no doubt that full support of parliaments of all member states of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) can help materialize all of its objectives in the best form possible, Nikzad stressed.

Some European...

FROM PAGE 1

Answering a question about the 7th round of Vienna talks on the removal of illegal sanctions imposed on the country, the spokesman said, “Iranian negotiating delegation will enter the talks with a serious will aiming to reach an agreement and have fruitful talks.” “What is important is that if the United States comes to Vienna with the determination to resolve the issues that were not resolved in the previous rounds, the talks will face an easier path. But if the United States continues its previous measures, Iran will definitely have several choices,” he added. FM spokesperson also answered a question about Iran’s plan to continue negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency. “Rafael Grossi’s visit to Iran was part of a technical exchange between Iran and the IAEA. There were good conversations at various levels, which left incomplete because we did not reach a definitive agreement on some words and concepts that were important to both, he noted. Khatibzadeh went on to say that the agreed clauses are almost finalized and the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran will have meetings with the Agency in the coming days regarding the finalization of the text of the agreement. Regarding the actions of the Zionists in disrupting the Vienna negotiations, Khatibzadeh said, “The goal of the Zionist regime is to disrupt the international order. The intention of the Zionist regime to disrupt the JCPOA agreement is quite clear to us.” The Zionist regime, the Iranian diplomat said, as a regime that has hundreds of nuclear warheads and does not respect international monitoring systems, cannot comment on Iran’s peaceful nuclear program, which is being carried out under the monitoring of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

S. Korea Hopes...

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For its part, the Seoul government vowed to continue “diplomatic efforts” to revive the landmark deal, considering the significance of the alliance with the U.S. as well as its relations with Iran. Although Seoul is not part of the multilateral accord, it has closely communicated with Washington on the matter amid a prolonged diplomatic feud with Iran over its assets here frozen under fresh U.S. sanctions. About \$7 billion worth of Iranian assets remain locked in South Korean banks under U.S. sanctions that were put back in place following Washington’s 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Russia Optimistic...

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Days earlier, Ulyanov told the IAEA Board of Governors that the root causes of Iran’s reduction of its nuclear obligations under the JCPOA need to be mentioned whenever discussing the issue. “No one talks about the root causes,” Ulyanov said, adding, “It must be remembered that the termination of the temporary application of the Additional Protocol was the result of the [US] policy of ‘maximum pressure’ and the assassination of an Iranian scientist.” He was making a reference to the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran’s top nuclear scientist, on November 27, 2021, in a terrorist attack widely attributed to the Israeli regime.

Kambosos Becomes Unified Lightweight Champ

NEW YORK (AFP) - Australia's George Kambosos used a relentless attack and a stinging overhand right to become the undisputed lightweight boxing champion with a shocking split decision victory over Teofimo Lopez on Saturday night in New York.

Both boxers came into the fight undefeated but Kambosos, who survived a 10th round knockdown, made sure he was the one to leave with the 135-pound straps.

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Axelsen Clinches Indonesia Open Title

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Olympic gold medalist Viktor Axelsen clinched the Indonesia Open men's singles title after beating Singapore's Loh Kean Yew in the final on Sunday.

The 27-year-old scored a victory against Loh 21-13, 9-21, 21-13 in an intense 59-minute game in the badminton tournament held on the palm-fringed holiday island of Bali.

Axelsen's victory came after his compatriot Anders Antonsen was forced to withdraw from the tournament due to an injury in his right chest.

Booker Shines As Suns Rout Nets

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Devin Booker scored 30 points and the Phoenix Suns led wire-to-wire to easily beat the Brooklyn Nets 113-107 and extend their winning streak to 16 games.

The Suns now have the second longest winning streak in franchise history as they survived a late comeback by Brooklyn. They are trying to equal the 2006-07 team which holds the record of 17 straight wins. Phoenix plays Golden State on Tuesday.

Booker did most of his damage in the first and third quarters, shooting nine of 18 from the floor overall and nailing four three pointers in 32 minutes of playing time.

Chris Paul finished with 22 points, eight assists and five rebounds and recorded his 5,000th career rebound in the second quarter in front of the crowd of 18,070 at Barclays Center arena.

Mikal Bridges added 13 while Deandre Ayton and JaVale McGee contributed 10 apiece in the win.

Kevin Durant scored a game-high 39 points for the Nets, who had their four-game winning streak snapped.

James Harden shot just four of 15 from the floor but finished with a triple double of 12 points, 14 assists and 13 rebounds.

Elsewhere, Taurean Prince made a clutch layup with four seconds remaining in double overtime to lift the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 121-120 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers.

D'Angelo Russell led the Timberwolves with 35 points as they had to overcome a 42 point and 14 rebound performance by Joel Embiid, who missed three weeks because of Covid-19.

Karl-Anthony Towns tallied 28 points and 10 rebounds before fouling out and Anthony Edwards scored 19 and Naz Reid chipped in 13 in the win.

The 27-year-old Embiid had a chance to



win it but had his shot blocked as time expired in the second overtime.

The Timberwolves won their sixth-straight game as they were aggressive at both ends of the court.

The Timberwolves reached the .500 mark this week for the first time since the opening stretch of the season.

They began the season by winning three of their first four games before a six-game losing streak. The winning streak includes five victories by a double-digit margin.

Tobias Harris added 17 points, Tyrese Maxey had 15 and Seth Curry 14 for the Sixers.

Centre Embiid was back in the lineup after missing nine games. He tested positive for the coronavirus on November 8. Embiid was averaging 21.4 points and 9.6 rebounds in nine games before his positive test.

The Sixers struggled in his absence by losing seven of the nine games.

Embiid was runner-up for MVP honours last season when he averaged 28.5 points and 10.6 rebounds in 51 games. Denver Nuggets star Nikola Jokic won the award.

Christian Wood scored 33 points and Houston finally put away visiting Charlotte to win 146-143 and notch its first back-to-back wins of the season.

Houston has won just three of 19 games this season, and two of those have come across a four-night span. This one came against a Hornets team that had won eight of its previous nine games.

The Rockets sank 23 shots from 3-point range. This came a night after Charlotte matched its franchise record by making 23 shots from 3-point territory.



LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola will not manage a Premier League team other than Manchester City and he wants to stay with the Etihad club as long as possible, the 50-year-old said.

Guardiola took over at City in 2016 and has led the club to three Premier League titles and the FA Cup. The Spaniard's contract is due to expire in 2023. Guardiola said he would like to lead a national team at a World Cup one day.

Asked if he would consider coaching the England national team, Guardiola hailed Gareth Southgate for his work with the Three Lions. "I would love, I said many times, when I finish here, the pleasure to lead a team at a World Cup. But it is not easy to find it. There are only a few positions," Guardiola told British media.

"I would like it, but if it doesn't happen, I will train clubs, so it will not be a problem. "But in England, being here I think always I will be Man City and if I have to come back it would be at Man City, if they want me. I would not train another club in England apart from this club." Guardiola congratulated England coach Southgate for signing a new contract and said that he is not looking to "take a position from anyone".

Saudi Arabian Dunes to Host Dakar Rally 2022

PARIS (Dispatches) - The Dakar rally will be raced across the daunting deserts of Saudi Arabia again in 2022 with organisers on Sunday revealing the full route that exploits the depths of the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter).

The January 1-14 endurance test will be a third Dakar rally in Saudi Arabia, a country accused by the international community of a poor human rights record.

But it will also be the 44th edition of the rally itself, with 1,065 participants aboard 578 vehicles racing across 8,375km of treacherous routes in the various categories.

The landscape and backdrop of the course is similar to the last edition, and it begins and ends after 12 stages in the port city of Jeddah.

From canyons and cliffs in the Neom region to stretches of dunes surrounding Riyadh, the race also takes in the Red Sea coastline and the mysterious Empty Quarter.

Hybrid vehicles make their debut with top contenders Stephane Peterhansel, a 14-time winner, and Carlos Sainz winner in 2010, 2018 and 2020 behind the wheel in the new category.

In the motorbike race previous champions Toby Price, Sam Sunderland, Matthias Walkner, Ricky Brabec and Kevin Benavides will all also be at the start line.

Motorbike and quad racers will be kitted out with airbag vests, which can minimise the consequences of high-speed impact.

Williams Racing Founder Frank Williams Dies

LONDON (Dispatches) - Frank Williams, the founder of Formula One outfit Williams Racing, has died at the age of 79, the team announced on Sunday.

The team won the F1 drivers' title seven times and the constructors' championship on nine occasions under Williams' stewardship, although the most recent triumphs came in 1997. The Englishman stepped down from the board of Williams Formula One in 2012 and his family ended 43 years of involvement in the team last year, following its sale to Dorilton Capital.



Messi Sets Up PSG Comeback Win

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain overturned an early deficit to beat 10-man Saint-Etienne 3-1 away in Ligue 1 on Sunday, with Lionel Messi setting up all three goals.

The match also featured the long-awaited PSG debut of Spanish defender Sergio Ramos, while Neymar left the pitch sobbing in agony, stretchered off with an ankle injury.

Still in November, the result leaves PSG on 40 points, 14 clear of second-placed Nice, who lost 1-0 at home to struggling Metz on Saturday.

Saint-Etienne took a surprise lead when Denis Bouanga beat the offside trap to fire a shot past Gianluigi Donnarumma on 23 minutes, with PSG left waiting for a flag which never came, with a VAR review confirming the goal.

The hosts, languishing in the bottom two but on the back of two straight league

wins, held their own against PSG, who appeared more affected by the freezing cold and gusting snow.

All that changed with a red card.

There was no VAR to save the hosts on the stroke of half-time when back-tracking defender Timothee Kolodziejczak was sent off for a flailing challenge on Kylian Mbappe. PSG then levelled when Marquinhos scored with a towering header as Messi floated in the subsequent free-kick, sending in the sides level, but with the hosts hanging their heads.

The second half was one-way traffic with further goals coming from Angel Di Maria on 79 and centre-back Marquinhos again in time added on -- Messi again providing inch-perfect passes.

But there was bad news for PSG late on as Neymar fell in full flight after treading on a defender's leg and twisting his ankle in a way that made his teammates wince.

The result sees Saint-Etienne slip to the foot of the table, behind Metz on goal difference.

Palmeiras Win Title for Second Year

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Deyverson scored an extra-time winner as reigning champions Palmeiras retained the Copa Libertadores with a 2-1 victory over Flamengo in an all-Brazilian final in Montevideo.

Palmeiras struck five minutes in through Raphael Veiga but ex-Inter Milan forward Gabriel Barbosa equalized in the second half for 2019 winners Flamengo.

On-loan Manchester United midfielder Andreas Pereira committed a horrible mistake in the 95th minute to allow Deyverson to run through and earn Palmeiras the biggest club title in South American football for the second year in a row, and third time overall.

"Our team was very good and very focused today. We literally left our lives on the field. We had to play like this, it was a Libertadores final," said Palmeiras captain Gustavo Gomez.

Only the fifth final to contain two teams from the same country in the tournament's 61-year history, it was the first ever Libertadores showpiece to feature the winners of the previous two editions.

Sao Paulo-based Palmeiras, who beat Santos to lift the 2020 trophy in January, took the lead at the Estadio Centenario when Veiga rifled in a cutback from Mayke after a superb pass out of defense by Gomez. Barbosa, the competition's leading scorer with 10 goals coming into the final, headed wide before Uruguay international Giorgian De Arrascaeta forced a sharp save from Palmeiras goalkeeper Weverton.

Diego Alves kept Flamengo in the game with a flying stop to tip over from Rony early in the second half, with former Chelsea and Arsenal defender David Luiz denied by another good save from Weverton.



Britain, Croatia Through to Davis Cup Quarters

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain and Croatia booked spots in the Davis Cup quarter-finals after topping their respective groups on Sunday, while 28-times champions Australia were knocked out.

Britain's doubles pair of Joe Salisbury and Skupski won in straight sets to seal the tie against the Czech Republic 2-1 and secure top spot ahead of France.

Britain initially made things difficult when Dan Evans lost his singles rubber against Tomas Machac, capitulating in the second set when he looked on track to force a decider.

The Briton, ranked 25 in the world, won four games in a row and then went 5-2 up in the second set before losing five straight games to give 143rd ranked Machac a 6-2 7-5 victory.

However, British number one Cameron Norrie managed to pull one rubber back after being stretched to three sets, beating Jiri Lehecka 6-1 2-6 6-1. "It's never easy being favorite and never easy in this situation but I really enjoyed the match," Norrie said. "All credit to him but I managed to come back for a must-win match." Croatia, who beat Australia 3-0 in their opening tie, booked top spot in their group and a quarter-final tie against Italy after Nino Serdarcus beat Hungary's Fabian Marozsan 6-4 6-4.

The 2018 champions were pegged back, however, when Hungary's 282nd-ranked Zsombor Piros recovered to beat former U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic 4-6 7-5 6-4 -- his second major scalp after dispatching Australia's John Millman on Saturday.

Croatia won the doubles decider and the result means Australia finished runners-up but cannot advance as one of two best second-placed teams with a 2-4 win-loss record. Kazakhstan also reached the last eight as group winners after Mikhail Kukushkin and Alexander Bublik won their singles rubbers against Canada to take an unassailable 2-0 lead, with Sweden finishing second in the group.

