

Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 131,167 With 43 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

# IRAN NEWS

The Fire Continues to Rage in Part Of the forests at Golestan Province, North of Iran as Firefighters, Department of Environment's Forces, Armed Forces, and Locals Are Trying to Extinguish the Fire

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## Iran to Eliminate Foes Before Approaching Its Territory

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of Iran's IRGC Navy said on Tuesday that the Iranian defense forces would obliterate the foes before they even approach the southern Iranian islands.

Speaking on the sidelines of the IRGC's maritime drills, Brigadier-General Alireza Tangsiri said that IRGC forces showed in this military exercise that they would obliterate the foe before they could approach Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf.

He praised the accuracy of the forces in using specialized weapons and said that these high-accuracy weapons were a source of pride for Iran's armed forces.

The IRGC launched a large-scale military exercise in an area stretching along the southern shores of the country on the Persian Gulf and the strategic Strait of Hormuz, with the participation of airborne units, ground, and naval forces.

"In the Great Prophet 17 joint drills, we defended the islands firmly and showed that we will destroy enemies before they come near, and if some of the foes trespass, we will target them with deterrent weapons," the IRGC navy commander said on the sidelines of the military drills on Tuesday.

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## Iran Will Be Soon Linked To Mediterranean Sea

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi says with some contracts are underway to be signed in the field of transportation for completing its infrastructures and soon the contract for the Shalamchek-Basra Railway network will be signed with Iraq and it will link Iran to the Mediterranean Sea.

Speaking in a ceremony for operation of railway devices, Ghasemi announced the news and said with signing the contract with Iraqis Iran will be linked to the Mediterranean Sea, adding that the country needs to boost its infrastructures in the field of transportation especially for the transit sector and above all rail transit, and to this end, talks are underway for signing some contracts.

He went on to say that some time ago Iran tentatively shipped a consignment from the route of India to Finland for testing the new corridor of Iran-Finland and it took only 21 days while if this cargo was to be shipped by sea, it would have taken at least 3 months. Ghasemi added that recently some Pakistani trucks tentatively passed from Iran to reach Europe, adding that he believes these transit routes can be a source of income for the country.

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## ITI Rail Link Opens in Blow To U.S. Bid to Sideline Iran



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The first freight train to run from Pakistan to Turkey through Iran has departed after a 10-year hiatus in a major boost to the trading credentials of the three founders of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

The 6,540 km journey from Islamabad to Europe's largest city will take 10 days, less than half the time needed for the equivalent voyage of 21 days by sea.

The train left a depot at Margala station in the Pakistan capital to the Turkish city on the Bosphorus Strait on Tuesday, hauling dozens of containers.

It will cover 1,990 km inside Pakistan, passing through Quetta into Taftan at the Iranian border and on to Tehran and Tabriz over a 2,603 km stretch before ending up in Istanbul through Ankara.

The three countries launched the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) container train service in 2009, but it only got as far as test runs and was never fully operational.

Even so, they always planned to follow up the initial freight trains with passenger services and operationalize the ITI transnational line with the aim of enhancing connectivity with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

"The start of the container train from Pakistan to Iran and Turkey was a long-standing dream of the countries of the region, which came true again," Pakistan's Railways Minister Azam Khan Swati told the opening of the project.

He said strengthening and expanding ECO rail cooperation can contribute to regional stability and peace.

"Regional business cohesion is in dire need of important projects such as the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul railway," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said.

"As one of the most effective vehicles, the ECO train can virtually help expand exports, imports and trade among the member countries," Adviser to Prime Minister of Pakistan for Commerce and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood told the ceremony.

The ITI, by extension, will connect to China's Xinjiang autonomous region which is populated by ethnically Turkic Uighur Muslims and further boost BRI, a trillion-dollar plan to connect the infrastructure and economies of countries across Asia, Africa and Europe.

China regards Iranian transport in particular as part of BRI and has sought close involvement in the build-out of the West Asian nation's infrastructure. The ITI railroad, on the other hand, will help Iran move around U.S. sanctions.

For Tehran, this is an attractive alternative trade route because the ECO countries trade in local currencies.

ECO stands for the Economic Cooperation Organization, a 10-member political and economic intergovernmental organization founded in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

The United States has been following a policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran in order to isolate the country through severing all modes of international trade with the Islamic Republic. However, it is practically impossible to isolate and stop Iran from trading with its neighbors.

Earlier this month, an official with Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization said the Islamic Republic, Azerbaijan and Georgia have reached an agreement on establishing a transit route connecting the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea.

"Georgia and Iran are the two main parties to the agreement, as Iran is connected to the free waters through the Persian Gulf, and Georgia has two important trading ports east of the Black Sea," Javad Hedayati said.

"On the other hand, Georgia and Azerbaijan have made great efforts to improve and develop their transportation infrastructure, so we have tried to increase cooperation with both these countries," he added.

This transit route can potentially link with the ITI and further boost connectivity in the region, given that Pakistan and Turkey are both close allies of Azerbaijan in addition to having strong trade relations with Iran.

## UNSC Urged to Compel Israel to Stop Aggression Against Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Zahra Ershadi says the United Nations Security Council must act to force Israel to end the occupation of Syria's Golan Heights and aggression against the country.

Ershadi made the remarks in an address to a UN Security Council session on the situation in Syria on Monday during which she strongly condemned "all aggressions of the Israeli regime against Syria."

Reaffirming Syria's inherent right to self-defense and to respond to Israel's acts of aggression at a time and place of its choosing, Iran's deputy ambassador to the UN said, "The Security Council must compel the Israeli regime to end the occupation of the Syrian Golan and also stop immediately its aggressions against Syria."

The senior diplomat added that "the continued occupation of parts of Syrian territory by foreign forces, which constitutes flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter, must come to an end."

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## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



## Martyr Soleimani, Hero of Hearts

On January 3, Iranians along with the world peace-loving people will commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of the hero of hearts and brave fighter of all times Martyr Brigadier General Qasem Soleimani.

Martyr Soleimani and his comrades were assassinated in a drone attack ordered by former U.S. President Donald Trump outside Baghdad International Airport in January 2020.

On Monday, President Ebrahim Raisi said the former commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Quds Force created a huge capacity in the Muslim world by training Iraqi and Syrian forces.

Raeisi made the remarks in a meeting with members of a special headquarters set up to mark the martyrdom anniversary of Soleimani.

"Haj Qassem managed to train very good forces out of Iraqis and Syrians to defend those countries and fight oppression, and in doing so, he created a huge capacity in the Islamic world," Iran's president said.

The president pointed to remarks by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei who noted that General Soleimani should be viewed as a school of thought, saying, "The fact is that Haj Qassem was not a single person but a school of thought, who sent a message to all societies."

Raisi stated that General Soleimani first developed his own personality and then tried to help others improve theirs.

General Soleimani and deputy commander of Iraq's Hashd al-Shaabi Mahdi al-Muhandis, the two iconic figures in the fight against the Daesh terrorist group, were assassinated in a U.S. airstrike outside the Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Iranian officials have on several occasions vowed to avenge the death of the two top commanders.

Tehran has denounced the assassinations as "state terrorism" and vowed to end the American presence in the region as the ultimate act of revenge, while urging neighboring Iraq to expel the U.S. forces from the country.

A research revealed in October that a secretive UK intelligence base was likely involved in the U.S. military's drone strike that assassinated the top Iranian anti-terror commander, among its other controversial targeted killings.

The UK Royal Air Force intelligence base in Yorkshire, Menwith Hill, was likely involved in the U.S. assassination of top Iranian counter-terrorism commander Soleimani, a new report reveals.

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## Security Achievable Via Cooperation Between Tehran, Regional States

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian ambassador to London said that regional security, friendship, and prosperity can be achieved through the cooperation between Tehran and regional countries rather than foreign interventions.

Unfortunately, some Arab countries ignore Iran's open arms for negotiation, dialogue, and respectful neighborly policy, and issue a statement in London against the great and powerful Iran, the Iranian Ambassador Mohsen Baharvand wrote on his Instagram account in reaction to the anti-Iran statement issued by the foreign ministers of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and the British Foreign Minister on Monday.

According to him, regional security, friendship, and prosperity can be achieved through the cooperation between Tehran and regional countries rather than foreign interventions. The British and Arab foreign ministers claimed that the sanction lifting talks in Vienna between Iran and the P4+1 are Iran's last chance to restore security in the region, Baharvand said.

Iran has been making the same demands of these Persian Gulf countries and Britain for years, he reminded.

Saying everyone must know that who has the most unwarranted interference and destructive move in the region, he added that Iran has always extended the hand of friendship to its neighbors and invited them to sit down for constructive talks.



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## Two Guided Missile Destroyers Rejoin Iranian Navy

BUSHEHR (IRNA) - Iranian Navy redeployed two guided missile destroyers on Tuesday after overhauling them.

Named Gorz (mace) and Khanjar (dagger), the two destroyers rejoined the fleet in a ceremony in Bushehr port, southern Iran attended by Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani and Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari.

The navy's technical commander said that the destroyers were overhauled by the navy's engineers and knowledge-based companies, replacing parts and engines with locally made ones.

## Europeans Criticized For Not Being Committed To JCPOA Obligations

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian vice president for legal affairs says while the United States was violating the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, European signatories to the agreement just stood by and watched its violations.**

Mohammad Dehqan made the remarks in a Monday meeting with German Ambassador to Tehran Hans-Udo Muzel, during which the two sides exchanged views on various issues, including the future outlook of negotiations in the Austrian capital on the restoration of the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), to its original state.

"The U.S. is to blame for the violation of the JCPOA and we expected Europe, especially Germany, to play an active role in this regard. The JCPOA was an international document, which had been upheld by the United Nations Security Council. Europe merely stood by and watched US violating the JCPOA. History will not judge Europeans' conduct kindly," Iran's vice president said.

"Iran has always welcomed negotiations and has never left the negotiating table. In the past, we tried to do away with international concerns by remaining compliant with the JCPOA unilaterally. Now, we still hope that we would clinch a balanced deal after the inauguration of the new German government and through more active participation of Europeans" in Vienna talks, Dehqan added.

The JCPOA was abandoned by former U.S. President Donald Trump in May 2018. Trump then targeted Iran's economy with what he called a "maximum pressure" campaign, which failed to compel Tehran to negotiate a "new deal."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Dehqan pointed to the 150-year track record of cordial relations between Iran and Germany as well as cultural commonalities between the two nations, saying that the Iranian administration's policy is to expand ties with



different countries. He also expressed hope that Iran's relations with Germany would be further strengthened.

"We want Germany, as a powerful European country, to maintain its independence, not be influenced by American unilateralism and appear as an effective player in the international arena," the senior Iranian official pointed out.

He rejected "baseless" claims that Iran has been seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction, saying, "During the [Iraqi] imposed war, Iran did not possess any weapons of mass destruction as it does not believe in such weapons."

"This is a baseless accusation that Iran has sought to obtain nuclear weapons. We have never been, and are not after nuclear weapons," Iran's vice president said.

He slammed European countries' double standards when it comes to atomic weapons and said, "Europe does not care about the Zionist regime's nuclear weapons, which endanger the security of the region."

The German ambassador, for his part, said the new government in Germany, as a non-nuclear country, will try to facilitate the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement between Iran and the P4+1 group of countries and promote stability in relations among states.

He added that the Vienna negotiators have returned to their capitals after reaching an agreement on how to continue the talks, expressing hope that the eighth round of the talks, which is expected to resume after New Year's holidays, would result in positive outcomes.

## Tehran Calls for Increased Int'l Aid for Afghanistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian foreign minister has called for a boost to international humanitarian efforts for Afghanistan, describing as massive the influx of Afghan refugees into neighboring countries compared to the very small volume of international aid for them.

In a meeting with UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in Tehran, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian praised the agency's assistance but described it as "woefully insufficient" given the wave of displaced Afghans heading toward neighboring countries.

"The wave of Afghan refugees heading toward neighboring borders is increasingly high and the volume of international aid is very small," Amir-Abdollahian said.

He called on the UNHCR to play a more active role inside Afghanistan and help reduce the inflow of refugees through aid efforts.

The chief Iranian diplomat proposed that the UNHCR and the UN chief put on the agenda an international conference on fundraising for the Afghan people.

Iran cannot always be expected to help the Afghans and the European countries must do their part in this regard as the presence of thousands of refugees on their borders is turning into a crisis, he stated.

"Iran does not have the capacity to provide services more than the current level to new asylum seekers, and the international community must pay special attention to the living conditions of the Afghan people," Amir-Abdollahian added.

He also said that more than 520,000 foreign students are studying for free in Iran and that the vaccination drive in the country has included Afghan refugees like the Iranian citizens.

Grandi, for his part, praised Iran's extensive efforts to help new Afghan refugees.

He also hailed as a humanitarian and important measure the vaccination of a high percentage of Afghans in Iran and the resettlement of new refugees entering the Iranian border on a daily basis.

He further said the idea of holding an international summit to raise funds for the Afghan people was significant.

## IRGC Precision-Strike Drones Hit Fixed

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Precision-strike combat drones as well as sophisticated ballistic and cruise missiles have played a major role in the large-scale military exercises that Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is holding in an area stretching along the southern shores of the country.

On Tuesday and the second day of the Great Prophet 17 joint drills, the IRGC aerospace forces flew unmanned aerial vehicles, and the aircraft struck a series of fixed and mobile targets on the ground and in the sea using bombs with pinpoint accuracy.

Attack helicopters provided close air support (CAS) and fired accurately at the designated targets.

Troops practiced coastal defense exercises and anti-heliborne tactics as well.

Additionally, IRGC forces launched volleys of various surface-to-surface, anti-ship missiles, and coast-to-sea ballistic missiles against vessels, facilities, and bases of the hypothetical enemy and destroyed them as planned.

IRGC naval units also utilized domestically-developed offshore and onshore air defense systems against hostile drones.

Moreover, the participating divisions fired advanced anti-ship cruise missiles simultaneously from the coast and Zolfagar-class fast attack craft and struck the enemy's vessels.

In another operation, two Sukhoi Su-17 fighter bombers hit designated targets on the ground.

The Great Prophet 17 drills kicked off on Monday, covering the coastlines of the southern Iranian provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan.

The IRGC Deputy Chief of Operations and spokesman for the joint drills Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan said the military exercises involve various IRGC units, such as the aerospace force and the cyber-electronic division.

He noted that the participating units will carry out offensive operations so as to destroy the hypothetical enemy's sources of attacks.

Iran's Armed Forces hold routine military exercises throughout the year.

## Japan Envoy Hails Iranian Poet Ferdowsi



MASHHAD (IRNA) - Japanese Ambassador to Iran Kazutoshi Aikawa has underlined that renowned Iranian poet Ferdowsi played key role in consolidating national identity in Iran.

According to Khorasan Razavi Cultural Heritage Organization, the ambassador made the remarks during a visit to a cultural and historical complex in Tous and mausoleum of Ferdowsi on Monday.

Pointing to cultural commonalities of two nations of Iran and Japan, he said that there are some epic literature in Japan, which helped consolidate national identity in the East Asian country, and that Ferdowsi's poems have played the same role in Iran.

As to narration of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh performed in front of the ambassador, he noted that he became acquainted with epic lifestyle of the Iranian people.

Kazutoshi Aikawa also expressed hope for expansion of bilateral ties between Iran and Japan.

He further pointed to development of economic ties with Iran in particular with Khorasan Razavi province, noting that his embassy will make all-out efforts to remove obstacles in the way of trade cooperation between Japanese and Iranian companies.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he mentioned that Iran's services to Afghan refugees have impressed him.

For his part, Governor General of Khorasan Razavi province Yaghubali Nazari expressed hope that other countries such as Japan would assist Iran to help foreign refugees particularly Afghan asylum seekers.

Nazari went on to say that Japanese firms pursue appropriate cooperation with companies active in the province, noting that his office is ready to help Japanese companies in expanding collaborations in renewable energies.

## Tehran, Yerevan Review Ways To Widen Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chairman of Iran-Armenia parliamentary friendship group Mehdi Farshadan and President of National Assembly of Armenia Alen Simonyan have held talks on expansion of parliamentary relations between the two countries.

The talks were held in Armenia on Monday.

During the talks, Simonyan assured that the visit of the Iranian delegation to Yerevan and the continuation of parliamentary cooperation will help the expansion of Armenia-Iran relations in various fields.

For his part, Farshadan presented an invitation message from Iran's Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf to Simonyan to visit Iran.

Also, the two reviewed capacities of both parliaments for promotion of cultural, economic and political ties.

During their stay in Armenia, members of the Iranian delegation will meet with the host country's officials and visit cultural centers in the country.

## No Lawsuit Against Iran On Ukrainian Plane Crash

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - The Judiciary Spokesman clarified the latest status of the plaintiffs on the Ukrainian plane crash.

In his weekly press conference, Zabihullah Khodaeian stated on Tuesday that the case Ukrainian plane crash was heard in the prosecutor's office and sent to the court.

In response to a question on the Ukrainian Plane Crash, Khodaeian noted: some hearings were held in the presence of the plaintiffs.

Because there were shortcomings in the case, the president of the court returned the case to the prosecutor's office, mentioning the shortcomings, so that after the defect is eliminated, we will send it to the court and continue the investigation, for example, one of the defects was that the expert theory should be communicated to the plaintiffs."

Khodaeian also reported that the Canadian government had not yet filed a lawsuit.

The Ukrainian airliner was shot down shortly after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport on January 8, killing all 167 passengers and nine crew members.

He also warned prosecution for those who publish confidential letters by insisting that publishing confidential letter, referring to Ali Larijani's publishing the letter of the Guardian Council over the reasons for his disqualification in the presidential election.

He said that if it became clear that the Council of Guardians' letter to Larijani about his disqualification in the presidential election had been published in his own hands, it would be prosecutable.

He went on to say that it should be reviewed by intelligence agencies "who published this letter with a confidential seal."

According to him, leaking confidential documents is a crime and can be prosecuted if someone publishes them without authorization.

## Iran's Envoy to Yemen Passes Away

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to Yemen, Hassan Irloo, has passed away of COVID-19 complications after certain countries delayed his return home for medical treatment.

Irloo had earlier this week been repatriated from Yemen amid Saudi aerial blockade on the war-torn Arab country to receive treatment at a hospital in Tehran.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, said the envoy passed away from complications related to the coronavirus in the early hours of Tuesday.

He said Irloo was transferred to the country in a "bad state" and due to "late cooperation" of some countries, a reference to Saudi Arabia a war veteran, Irloo had sustained injuries from chemical warfare attacks on Iran during Iraq's 1980-88 imposed war, backed by the West.

He contracted the coronavirus at the place of his mission, and passed away early on Tuesday "despite undergoing all stages of treatment to improve his condition", Khatibzadeh said.

## Inclusive Gov't to Guarantee Future of Afghan Nation

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister stressed that the future of Afghanistan will be guaranteed through the formation of an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups.

"Diverse conversations on the sidelines of the OIC Summit in Islamabad, I stressed developing cooperation with Pakistan, neighboring and Islamic countries", the Iranian Foreign Minister tweeted.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks referring to his recent visit to Pakistan to attend the 17th Extraordinary Session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

"The future of Afghanistan will be guaranteed through the formation of an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups", he also stressed. The liberation of the Palestinian motherland and the first qibla of Muslims was also discussed, he added.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:15
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:11

21. Or have they taken (for worship) gods from the earth who can raise (the dead)?  
22. If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah,  
there would have been confusion in both! but glory to Allah, the Lord of the Throne:  
(High is He) above what they attribute to Him!

Surah 21. The Prophets (21 - 22)

## Belgian Companies Eager to Work With Iranian Counterparts

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Ambassador of Belgium to Tehran Gian Marco Rizzo in meeting with Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Gholam-Hossein Shafei voiced the interest of Belgian companies for cooperation with Iranian counterparts.**

In the meeting, Rizzo expressed his satisfaction for presence at the Iran Chamber as it is considered a focal point in Iran's economy and said taking advantage of the existing capacities is very important.

He emphasized that Belgium is very important core of link in Europe and it considers very valuable the interactions with its trade partners. He went on to say that Belgium is world's 17th biggest exporting country and it has good resources, adding that the country intends to make the most out of these resources through cooperation with its trade partners. He expressed hope the ties between Iran and Belgium would expand like in the past, and for this reason Brussels has kept open its trade office despite sanctions.

He then pointed to his country's structural system, adding that Belgium has been comprised of three parts and they enjoy close cooperation, noting that in each program their representatives are present to advance the program.

Meanwhile Shafei, for his part, pointed to the considerable capacities of Belgium in the field of transportation and new technologies and recommended cooperation between Tehran and Belgium in the fields of renewable energies production,



new technologies of irrigation and agriculture and renovation of industries.

Head of the ICCIMA also said Belgium is considered as one of the famous countries in the world because of its transportation system, adding that this country is considered as one of the best European states in terms of port capacities.

He went on to say that despite good capacities for bilateral cooperation, the trade between Iran and Belgium has been unsatisfactory due to sanctions and the pandemic in recent years and their trade volume has slumped to \$350m.

Shafei also pointed to the good agreements signed between the two countries in the past, adding that one of them was to remove charging double tax and called for providing infrastructures for its implementation.

He said since Iran's industry needs renovation in its industries, the cooperation in this field is a good ground for cooperation between the two states, adding that since Belgium has progressed well in irrigation technology and has good experience, the two countries can also cooperate in this field.

He also called for connection of Iran's Bandar Abbas Port with Port of Antwerp in Belgium as both ports enjoy special positions, and called for constant and effective relation between ICCIMA and Embassy of Belgium in Tehran and expressed hope chambers of commerce of both countries can cooperate under an organized and integrated programs.

## Gas Production From SP Phase 11 To Start Next October



**TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's state oil company says production from South Pars phase 11 will start next October.**

Iran plans to bring on line the last remaining phase of the giant South Pars gas field next year some five years after foreign contractors pulled out of the project under American pressure.

CEO of the state-run National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Mohsen Khojasteh Mehr said that production of gas from South Pars phase 11 is planned to start next October.

Khojastehmehr told the official IRNA news agency that the NIOC had decided to move a drilling platform from phase 12 to phase 11 to expedite the launching process.

"Phase 11 is the top priority in NIOC's development projects and it is going ahead with a good pace," said the deputy oil minister.

He also said that gas sweetening facilities with idle capacities in other phases will be mobilized to help process gas produced in phase 11.

Iran's development plans at South Pars 11 hit a snag in 2018 when French and Chinese contractors decided to abandon the project after the United States imposed sanctions on Tehran.

Iran then decided to award the \$5 billion project to Petropars despite objections raised by some experts who believed the local companies lacked the technology needed to develop the phase which is located in shallow water.

Iran has relied on domestic expertise and technology to develop all other 27 phases of South Pars, the world's largest gas field which is shared between Iran and Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

South Pars is currently responsible for more than 80% of Iran's gas production capacity of nearly 1 billion cubic meters per day.

## Iran's Export to Iraq Rises 15% in 8 Months yr/yr

**TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's export to Iraq has risen 15 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the secretary-general of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce announced.**

Referring to the growth of oil revenues, Hamid Hosseini said: "The value of Iran's exports to Iraq in the first eight months of this year, increased by \$800 million to stand at \$6.1 billion, and this export trend has risen in the second half of the year."

Meanwhile, the chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce has said Iran is planning to boost its annual trade with neighboring Iraq to \$20 billion.

Yahya Al-e Eshagh made the remarks in a business forum between Iran and Iraq's Kirkuk province earlier this month, saying that Iranian and Iraqi governments are determined to develop regional cooperation in all areas.

"Despite all events that are happening in the region, the relationship between the two countries of Iran and Iraq are on the upward trajectory," the official said.

The current administration of Iran under President Raisi has shown great interest in broadening and enhancing trade and economic ties with neighboring states, he emphasized.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the chairman of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce pointed to the country's planning for a \$20 billion trade with Iraq and put the current trade volume exchange between the two countries at about \$13-\$14 billion.

Iran and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on economic cooperation back in January, at the end of the fourth meeting of the two countries' Joint Economic Committee.

## Seoul Seriously Harmed by Iran Sanctions



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN - South Korea's ambassador to Iran says the country has suffered badly from more than three years of US sanctions on Iran as he insists that Seoul has been working hard to maintain its trade and energy ties with Iran despite excessive U.S. pressure.**

Yun Kang-hyeon said in remarks published on Monday by ILNA that South Korean petrochemical sector had been badly affected by Washington's 2018 decision to impose sanctions on Tehran which came after a former US government pulled out of an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program.

Yun told the ILNA news agency in an interview that South Korean petroleum industries had been heavily reliant on Iranian oil supplies before the sanctions were imposed mainly because of the special grade of the Iranian crude which he said is preferable for those industries.

"We hope that problems can be solved soon so that we can resume importing our oil needs from Iran and this will be good for everyone," said the ambassador, according to the Farsi translation of his remarks.

South Korea is waiting for the outcome of ongoing talks between Iran and world powers on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal so that it can return more than \$7 billion in Iranian funds blocked in the country because of U.S. sanctions.

The issue of blocked funds has caused dissatisfaction in Iran as authorities have even warned that Tehran may reconsider all its energy and trade ties with Seoul if the funds are not repatriated in due course.

Yun said, however, that South Korea has been forced to comply with US sanctions on Iran against its own will, adding that Seoul still continues to view Iran as its most important partner in the Middle East region.

## Kuwait Stops Issuing Visas For Iranian Merchants

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN - The head of Iran-Kuwait Joint Chamber of Commerce in Tehran says Kuwait has stopped issuing visas for Iranian businesspeople.**

Hani Feysali made the remarks in an interview on Monday, clarifying that the Iranian traders who are still doing business with Kuwait are those who have already been residents there.

He added that trade ties between the two countries have dropped drastically, mentioning the covid-19 pandemic as one of the reasons behind the plunge.

Iran has been losing trade also as a result of U.S. sanctions, which impose banking restrictions on Tehran.

According to official figures by the Iranian Customs Administration, exports to Kuwait in the first eight months of the Iranian calendar year (beginning March 21) were over \$90 million. The amount of Iran's annual exports was \$190 million two years ago before the coronavirus hit the world.

Feysali had earlier said that due to Iran's weak diplomacy, bilateral trade has been recording a downward trend in recent years as its total volume fell from \$400 million in 2020 to \$18 million last year.

Most trade between Iran and Kuwait is through Khorramshahr and Abadan ports. Foodstuff and construction products such as cement and plaster constitute most of Iran's exports.

## Transit Flights Capacity Over Iran Air Space Up

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - The managing director of Iranian Airports and Aviation Navigation Company said here on Monday that the capacity of transit flights over Iran air space has increased to 1,800 flights per day in 132 air corridors.**

Siavosh Amir-Mokri who was speaking at a press conference on the sidelines of the 5th Iranian Transportation Exhibition, said that "we now have the capacity for 1,800 transit flights per day in 132 air corridors over the Iranian air space and our country's air space is very favorable for the European flights heading for East Asia, on condition that the transit cost for passing through the Iranian air space will be economically justifiable for the foreign airways".

The managing director of Country's Airports and Aviation Navigation Company added that keeping in mind the formula inclusive of the plane weight, the length of path, and a fixed ratio of dollar, we have defined a transit cost, but both the lengths of the paths need to be decreased and we should consider discounts for foreign airlines so that passing through Iran's air space will be economically justifiable compared with those of the other countries.

"We obtained the discount permit from the government last year, and we are currently shortening the air paths' lengths, while Iran has the most no flight zones compared with the other regional countries, for lessening them we need to reach agreements with the armed forces," he said.

## Iran Exports \$533m Worth of Pistachio in 7 Months

**TEHRAN (MNA) – According to Iran's agriculture ministry, Iran has exported \$533m worth of pistachio during the first seven months of the Iranian year of 1400.**

Darab Hasani, Director-General of Cold Weather and Dry Crops Department of the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture or Iran or the agriculture ministry, in short, said Monday that pistachio is cultivated in over 500,000 hectares of lands in Iran and an average of 300,000 tons of the crops are produced annually in the country.

Hasani stated that exports of pistachio in Iran have witnessed an upward trend over the past 3 years, adding, in the year 1398 in the Iranian calendar (March 21, Oct. 22, 2019) 109,000 tons of pistachio valued at \$972 m were exported by Iran while the figures for the last year 1399 (March 21, Oct. 22, 2020) were 203,000 tons worth \$1.371b. He further said that during the first seven months of 1400 (March 21, Oct. 22, 2021), Iran exported 80,000 tons of pistachio worth \$533m.

Hasani stressed that the total production of pistachio in Iran in 1398 stood at 337,000 tons while that the volume of pistachio production in 1399 increased to 358,000 tons.

The official also said that the production of pistachio in Iran witnessed a downward trend this year, saying that Pistachio production is estimated to be standing at 281,000 tons, indicating a 21% decrease.

According to the statistics released by Food and Agriculture Organization (FOA), Iran is the top producer of pistachio in the world while it is the second exporter of the crop after the United States.



## Volcanic Eruption Outside Reykjavik Officially Over

REYKJAVIK (Dispatches) - The eruption of an volcano in Iceland, which drew hundreds of thousands of tourists and was the longest in 50 years, has been declared officially over, the authorities said Monday.

"It's been three months since lava last came out, so this eruption is now considered over," Bryndis Yr Tisladottir, specialist in natural hazards at the Icelandic Meteorological Institute (IMO), told AFP.

But the agency, which monitors volcanic activity, nevertheless called on hikers to be cautious, and it will continue to monitor the area. The eruption of lava began on March 19 on the outskirts of Mount Fagradalsfjall, about 30 kilometres (20 miles) southwest of the capital Reykjavik.



## Tigray Rebels Announce Withdrawal From 2 Regions

ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - Rebellious Tigrayan forces fighting the central government are withdrawing from neighboring regions in northern Ethiopia, a spokesperson for the Tigrayan forces said on Monday, a step towards a possible ceasefire after 13 months of brutal war.

"We trust that our bold act of withdrawal will be a decisive opening for peace," wrote Debretsion Gebremichael, the head of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the political party controlling most of the northern region of Tigray.

His letter to the United Nations called for a no-fly zone for hostile aircraft over Tigray, imposing arms embargos on Ethiopia and its ally Eritrea, and a U.N. mechanism to verify that external armed forces had withdrawn from Tigray.



## Russia Presses for Urgent U.S. Response on Security Guarantees



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia said it urgently needed a response from the United States on its sweeping security demands and again warned of a possible Russian military response unless it saw political action to assuage its concerns.

Moscow, which has unnerved the West with a troop buildup near Ukraine, last week unveiled a wish list of security proposals it wants to negotiate, including a promise NATO would give up any military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine.

Washington has said some of Russia's proposals are obviously unacceptable, but that the United States will respond some time this week with more concrete proposals on the format of any talks.

Konstantin Gavrillov, a Russian diplomat in Vienna, said that relations between Moscow and NATO had reached a "moment of truth".

"The conversation needs to be serious and everyone in NATO understands perfectly well despite their strength

and power that concrete political action needs to be taken, otherwise the alternative is a military-technical and military response from Russia," he was quoted as saying by RIA news agency.

The U.S. response is likely to shape Moscow's calculus over Ukraine, which has become the main flashpoint in East-West relations.

The United States and Ukraine say Russia may be preparing an invasion of its ex-Soviet neighbor. Russia denies that and says it is Ukraine's growing relationship with NATO that has caused the standoff to escalate. It has compared it to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, when the world came to the brink of nuclear war.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Moscow had so far received no response from the United States.

"I think they'll try to turn this into a slow-moving process, but we need it to be urgent, because the situation is very difficult, it is acute, it tends to become more complicated," he was quoted by RIA as saying.

The Kremlin said it was still too early to assess the West's response, but that information from "various sources" about a readiness to discuss the ideas was positive.

Asked separately about a Belarusian proposal to host Russian nuclear weapons in the event of similar deployments in its vicinity by the West, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow had numerous options.

"It's no secret the deployment of different types of armaments near our borders that could pose a danger would require corresponding steps to be taken to balance the situation. There are all sorts of options here," he said.

## Lula Vows a Broad Alliance Ahead of Brazil Election



SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazil's former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who is currently leading in the polls ahead of next year's election, said if reelected he would seek to build a broad range of alliances in a bid to unite a deeply polarized country.

In an interview, the 76-year-old former union leader promised to more fairly distribute wealth under a Workers Party government, and stressed the need to get rich Brazilians to pay more tax.

He also vowed to regain Brazil's international credibility, damaged by President Jair Bolsonaro. A South American trade deal with the European Union would be a priority, he said, as would strengthening ties with the United States and China.

"I don't want to fight: I want to join forces so we can build," he said at the Workers Party offices in downtown Sao Paulo.

It marks quite the reversal.

Just over two years ago he was in prison convicted of corruption, and until eight months ago he was banned from running for Brazil's top job.

With those convictions annulled by the Supreme Court, the former leftist leader is back in the running. While there is a long way to go until the October presidential elections - and Lula has yet to officially declare his candidacy - current polls show him notching 48%. Bolsonaro, widely criticized for his handling of the pandemic, is a distant second with 21%.

"A resurrection," Lula called it.

Lula governed Brazil from 2003 until 2010 and oversaw a period of dramatic economic growth - driven by a commodity boom - that helped lift millions out of poverty.

Under his government, deforestation in the Amazon rainforest fell and Brazil emerged as a global force. He left office with approval ratings of around 80%.

Polls suggest the memory of those years is selling well.

But today's reality, despite some parallels, is markedly different. Brazil's political spectrum is far more polarized, the pandemic has killed over 600,000 people and thrown many more into poverty.

## U.N. Chief Pushes for Beirut Port Blast Accountability

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Lebanon needed proper accountability for the August 2020 Beirut port explosion and that elections due to be held next year could usher in political stability in the troubled country.

His comments followed a meeting with Lebanese House Speaker Nabih Berri and a visit to the port, where he laid a wreath at a memorial for the more than 215 people killed when chemicals stored at the port for nearly seven years exploded.

"I know the will of the people to know the truth, the will of the people to have proper accountability," Guterres said on the second day of a visit aimed at rallying international support for Lebanon.

The blast 16 months ago was a strong blow to a country already crushed by an economic meltdown described by the World Bank as one of the world's worst since 1850.

Many Lebanese are looking to elections scheduled for the spring of next year to challenge the political establishment they hold responsible for the crisis and the blast.

Guterres said he had received a "guarantee" from Lebanese leaders that the elections would be held and said they could create "new political stability for the future."

Guterres, who arrived on Sunday, has also called on Lebanon's politicians to work to address an economic crisis that has left four in five Lebanese poor.

"Lebanese political leaders do not have the right to be divided and paralyzes the country," he said.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government has not met for more than two months amid a push by parties close to powerful politicians

charged in connection with the blast to remove the judge leading the investigation.

The blast has been widely blamed on the corruption and dysfunction normalized by a political elite that has been in power since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war.

## One Killed in Sudan Protests

KHARTOUM (AFP) - A Sudanese protester was shot dead during a "savage" crackdown on mass pro-democracy rallies Sunday, medics said, and 125 others were injured according to the health ministry.

Security forces fired tear gas canisters, and live rounds into the air, as hundreds of thousands marched, three years since the start of mass demonstrations that led to the ouster of veteran strongman Omar al-Bashir.

On Monday, the independent Doctors' Committee said 28-year-old Majzoub Mohammad Ahmad was shot and killed with "a bullet in the chest".

Nationwide, at least 46 people have been killed and scores wounded in the past two months, according to the Committee.

The health ministry said late Sunday that "123 people were injured in Khartoum and two in Kassala", a city in the east of Sudan.

Many of the injuries were from inhalation of acrid tear gas, including during clashes between the police and protesters near the presidential palace.

Demonstrators there had chanted slogans against military chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who led a coup on October 25.

The generals had initially detained civilian leader Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok for weeks under effective house arrest, but reinstated him on November 21 and promised elections for July 2023.

But the move alienated many of Hamdok's pro-democracy supporters, who dismissed it as providing a cloak of legitimacy for Burhan's coup.

The army on Monday insisted it backed "the democratic choice for the people" and supported "free and fair elections", a spokesman said in a statement.

Security forces on Monday maintained a barricade of bridges across the Nile river linking Khartoum with the cities of Omdurman and North Khartoum.

The Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) -- an umbrella group which spearheaded the protests against Bashir -- have urged people to continue to reject military power, calling for more demonstrations on December 25 and 30.



## UK Court Allows Appeal in Venezuela Central Bank Gold Case

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's Supreme Court has ruled to allow in part an appeal by Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido in a case over whether he or President Nicolas Maduro controls more than \$1bn worth of Venezuelan gold stored at the Bank of England.

The tug-of-war over the gold has centred on the issue of whether the British government recognises Guaido as Venezuela's head of state.

The Maduro and Guaido camps have each appointed a different board to the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) and the two have issued conflicting instructions concerning the gold reserves and a similar sum held by Deutsche Bank.

The court said a decision last year by the English Court of Appeal to overturn an earlier High Court ruling was "misplaced" as the British government's recognition of Guaido as Venezuela's interim president was "clear and unequivocal".

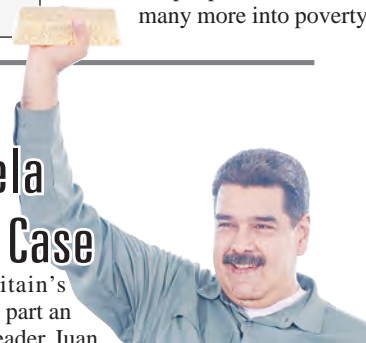
In a press release, the Supreme Court said on Monday that British courts were bound to accept that the British government does not recognize Maduro as Venezuela's president "for any purpose".

However, the court said it remained necessary to consider whether to recognise judgments by Venezuela's Supreme Court ruling that Guaido's transition statute was null and void, and it asked the Commercial Court to do so.

Maduro's BCV sued the Bank of England (BoE) in May 2020 to recover control of the gold, which it says it will sell to finance Venezuela's response to the coronavirus pandemic and bolster a health system gutted by years of economic crisis.

The BoE has refused to release the gold since the British government in early 2019 joined dozens of nations in backing Guaido on the basis that Maduro's election win the previous year had been rigged.

Venezuela's opposition has alleged that Maduro's cash-strapped administration wants to use the money to pay off his foreign allies, which his lawyers deny.





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## U.S. Motor Vehicle Travel Rises by 7.1% in October

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. motorists drove 7.1% more miles in October over 2020 levels as people return to offices and leisure trips, but the distance is off slightly from pre-pandemic levels.

The Federal Highway Administration said Monday motorists drove 277.5 billion miles in October, up 18.5 billion miles over the same month in 2020, but still down 5.6 billion miles over October 2019. For the first 10 months of 2021, road travel is up 11.2%, or 262.5 billion miles.



## Lira Plunges Again After Erdogan Defends Rate Cuts

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey's troubled lira nosedived Monday after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cited Muslim teachings to justify not raising interest rates to stabilize the currency.

Erdogan has pushed the central bank to sharply lower borrowing costs despite the annual rate of inflation soaring to more than 20 percent. Economists believe the policy could see consumer price increases reach 30 percent or higher in the coming months.

But Erdogan said in remarks aired by state television late Sunday that his Muslim faith prevented him from supporting rate hikes.

"They complain we keep decreasing the interest rate. Don't expect anything else from me," he said in the televised comments.

"As a Muslim, I will continue doing what our religion tells us. This is the command."

Islamic teachings forbid Muslims from receiving or charging interest on loaned or borrowed money.

Erdogan has previously cited his religion in explaining why he believes interest rates cause inflation instead of reining it in.

High interest rates are a drag on activity and slow down economic growth.

But central banks raise their policy rates out of necessity when inflation gets out of hand.

The Turkish lira has now lost nearly half its value in the past three months alone.

It was trading down more six percent against the dollar on Monday afternoon.

A dollar could buy 7.4 liras on January 1. It was worth 17.5 liras on Monday.

"You cannot run a modern economy integrated into the global economy on this basis," economist Timothy Ash of BlueBay Asset Management said in a note to clients.

"Even Saudi Arabia really does not attempt full shariah compliant macro(economic) management."

Turkey's nominally independent central bank -- stacked in the past year with Erdogan's allies and supporters -- has used four successive rate cuts to lower its policy rate to 14 percent from 19 percent.

Diplomats think the powerful but increasingly unpopular Turkish leader believes that economic growth at all costs will help him extend his rule into a third decade in an election due by mid-2023.

Erdogan last month launched a self-declared "economic war of independence" aimed at breaking Turkey's dependence on foreign investment and the fluctuating cost of imports such as oil and natural gas.

But the policy is meeting increasing resistance from powerful business leaders who had largely rallied around Erdogan during his 19-year rule.

The TUSIAD big business lobby of major exporters issued an unusually firm rebuke of the president over the weekend.

"The policy choices implemented here are not only creating new economic problems for businesses, but for all of our citizens," the big business lobby said.

"It is urgent that we assess the damage that has been done to the economy, and quickly return to the implementation of established economic principles, within the framework of a free market economy."

Erdogan attacked TUSIAD directly in his televised comments.

"I am calling you out," he said. "You have only one job: to ensure investment, production, employment and growth."

## Japan Enacts Record Extra Budget

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's parliament enacted a record supplementary budget worth over \$300 billion on Monday as part of measures to bolster the world's third largest economy as the pandemic threat drags on.

The extra budget -- larger than the total annual GDP of countries such as Colombia, Vietnam and Finland -- will fund part of the massive virus stimulus package announced last month by new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Upper House lawmakers approved the 35.98 trillion yen (\$317 billion) supplementary budget for the current fiscal year, with the majority allocated for economic measures.

They include cash handouts for children under 18, subsidies for small businesses, and pay rises for nurses and care-givers.

Japan passed three extra budgets in fiscal 2020-21 as manufacturing slowed during the pandemic and restrictions hit nightlife and tourism, but this marks the first for 2021-22 and the biggest yet.

Kishida became prime minister in October after his predecessor Yoshihide Suga stepped down partly over public discontent with his pandemic response.

After leading the ruling coalition to election victory, Kishida quickly announced a record 56 trillion yen in stimulus spending, roughly 10 percent of Japan's total GDP.

The country has recorded fewer than 18,400 Covid-19 deaths in its population of 126 million, despite avoiding harsh lockdowns.

Emergency measures targeting evening entertainment and crowd sizes at events were in place in major cities and other parts of Japan for much of the year, but were lifted in October.

This month, the Bank of Japan's latest quarterly Tankan business survey showed major manufacturers remain cautious about the economy's trajectory, with business sentiment flat for the quarter.



## SOCAR Targets Net Zero Emissions in Extraction From Own Sites

BAKU (Dispatches) - Azerbaijan's state energy firm SOCAR aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions in early 2022 in extracting oil and gas at its own sites, a company official told Reuters.

Oil and gas producing Azerbaijan, a signatory to the Paris climate deal, aims to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.

"We have been working on that from 2010 within the framework of the World Bank's Global Gas Flaring Reduction (GGFR)," Rafiga Guseinzade, SOCAR's first deputy

president on ecology, said about company's goal towards carbon neutrality.

Carbon emissions from SOCAR's fields stood at 9% to 10% in 2012 but have declined to 2% recently.

"In 2022 we will reach carbon neutrality," the manager said.

A company spokesman said the reduction of emissions was only related to the process of extraction of hydrocarbons. Some emissions not directly related to output will still be generated.

The company has also not set climate targets for projects which it develops jointly with partners.

SOCAR produced 6.58 million tons of oil and 6.55 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas at its own fields between January and October, or around a fifth of country's total oil and gas output.

It works with BP (BPL) and a number of other Western companies at other fields.

To reduce emissions, SOCAR has been shutting down mature fields, improving infrastructure and equipment.

"Thanks to the work we have done, it's possible to capture 300,000-600,000 cubic meters of natural gas, which had been effectively flared before for 20 years," Guseinzade said.

She added that SOCAR is able to increase natural gas output by up to 2 bcm per year by using ecologically friendly know-how at Neft Daslari and Gunashli shallow water fields.

SOCAR and BP have also pledged to develop green energy, jointly work in waste management and clean industry.

## China Cuts Interest Rates for First Time in 20 Months

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's central bank cut a benchmark interest rate on Monday for the first

time in nearly two years in a bid to kickstart growth in the world's number two economy as it creaks under the impact of a real estate crisis and coronavirus flare-ups.

The People's Bank of China said in a statement that it had lowered the loan prime rate (LPR) to 3.8 per cent from 3.85 per cent in November.

The move marks the first reduction of the rate -- which guides how much interest commercial banks charge to corporate borrowers -- since April 2020.

It also follows the bank's decision earlier this month to lower the amount of cash that lenders must hold in reserve, which it said would release 1.2 trillion yuan (RM794.5 billion) into the economy.

"Today's cut will immediately feed through to outstanding floating rate business loans and should also lead to cheaper loans for new fixed rate borrowers," said Mark Williams, chief Asia economist at Capital Economics.

"We expect a cut to the five-year LPR before long which will make mortgages slightly cheaper and help official efforts support housing demand," he added.

The reduction comes despite concerns about inflation, with factory gate prices rising at levels last seen in the mid-1990s.

China was the only major economy to expand in 2020 despite the pandemic, but growth has slowed this year owing to headwinds from a festering debt crisis in its property sector and localised Covid outbreaks.

The real estate industry -- a major growth driver -- remains a cause for concern, with several large companies including Evergrande defaulting on bond repayments in recent weeks.

Virus outbreaks in the nation's eastern and southern industrial hubs have also caused some districts to shut down and forced hundreds of thousands of people into quarantine and other restrictions.

## UK Supply Crunch Worsens With Stocks at Record Low



LONDON (Dispatches) - British manufacturers' inventory position deteriorated in December, which means the nation's supply issues could well continue into the New Year.

The CBI Industrial Trends Survey of 258 manufacturing firms revealed stock adequacy of finished goods worsened to a new record-low position for the second month in a row (-24% in December, from -16% in November).

Respondents also said they expect price pressures to remain acute in the next three months.

"At a time of continuing global supply chain difficulties, labor shortages and material shortages, the government should seek longer-term solutions that promote growth and investment in UK manufacturing," said Tom Crotty, chair of the CBI manufacturing council.

"On COVID-19, the government must offer clear guidance in good time for manufacturers to continue operating safely as the country grapples with the Omicron emergency."

The survey also showed that UK manufacturing output growth in the quarter to December accelerated to its fastest pace since July -- up 29% from 17% in November.

Output increased in 15 out of 17 sub-sectors, with growth being mostly driven by the food, drink & tobacco and motor vehicles & transport equipment sub-sectors.

Total order books in December were judged to be 'above normal' to a similar extent to last month's record high, while export orders were rated as broadly 'normal'.

"UK manufacturing demand remains strong, and output accelerated to meet this demand in December. However, behind the scenes, firms are battling pressures on a number of fronts," said Anna Leach, CBI deputy chief economist.

She said continued expectations for sharp price growth are a challenge for the sector, along with the spread of the Omicron variant dealing a blow to business confidence.

But she said "firms will welcome the government's decision to move from isolation to testing as a method of controlling the virus without unduly impacting their ability to operate."

## OPEC+ Produces Below Target in November

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ compliance with oil production cuts rose to 117% in November from 116% a month earlier, two sources from the group told Reuters, indicating production levels remain well below agreed targets.

Compliance from the 10 OPEC countries participating in the production cuts reached 122%, with participating non-OPEC countries achieving 107%, data seen by Reuters showed.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) said in its December oil market report that OPEC+ missed its production targets by 650,000 barrels per day (bpd) last month, compared with 730,000 bpd in October.



The OPEC+ data shows West African producers Nigeria and Angola continued to struggle to pump at target with Angola's compliance hitting its highest this year at nearly 300%. Nigerian compliance fell by 10 percentage points month on month to 239%, as the country raised production slightly.

The two countries have failed to produce at targets in recent years due to underinvestment, persistent maintenance issues and an exodus of international energy companies.

Production of Russian oil and gas condensate, the latter being excluded from the deal, has been broadly stable in December versus November.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak has said the country's oil production will reach pre-pandemic levels by May 2022.



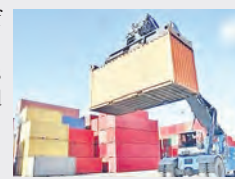
## Zanjan Non-Oil Exports Hit \$400m in 9 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The director-general of Zanjan Customs said that \$400 million worth of non-oil goods were exported from Zanjan province in the nine months of the current year (from March 21 to Dec. 21).

Speaking in a session on exports promotion of Zanjan province, Mir-Hashem Seyyed-Ahmadi described the exports level of products from

this province as 'satisfactory and good' and stated that 75 percent of provincial products has been exported to neighboring states.

Neighboring countries accounted for 75% share of total exports of Zanjan province in this period, he said, adding that lead and zinc are the top exported products of the province with 76% share of the total exports.



## EU Approves New Covid Jab to Stem Omicron Onslaught

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - The EU's drug regulator on Monday approved a fifth Covid jab as the U.S. warned of a bleak winter with the Omicron variant spurring new waves of infections globally.

Since it was first reported in South Africa in November, Omicron has been identified in dozens of countries, dashing hopes that the worst of the pandemic is over.

Despite indications it is not more severe than the Delta variant -- still the dominant strain -- Omicron has been shown in early data to have higher transmissibility and a worrying resistance to vaccines.

On Monday, the European Medicines Agency's human medicines committee approved Novavax, which uses a more conventional technology that the biotech firm hopes will reduce vaccine hesitancy.

"EMA has recommended granting a conditional marketing authorisation for Novavax's Covid-19 vaccine Nuvaxovid to prevent Covid-19 in people from 18 years of age," it said after an extraordinary meeting at its Amsterdam headquarters.

It is the fifth vaccine approved in the bloc after shots from Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, and the EU has already signed a deal to buy up to 200 million doses of the two-shot Novavax vaccine.

The firm says its vaccine showed 90.4 percent efficacy against Covid-19 in a North American trial.

Governments are scrambling to roll out booster shots to populations, with early data suggesting that a third dose offers increased protection against Omicron.

Moderna said Monday that a full dose of its vaccine given as a booster provides more antibody protection against the variant than currently authorized half-strength injections.

CEO Stephane Bancel called the results "reassuring", adding that the company is continuing to develop an Omicron-specific jab.

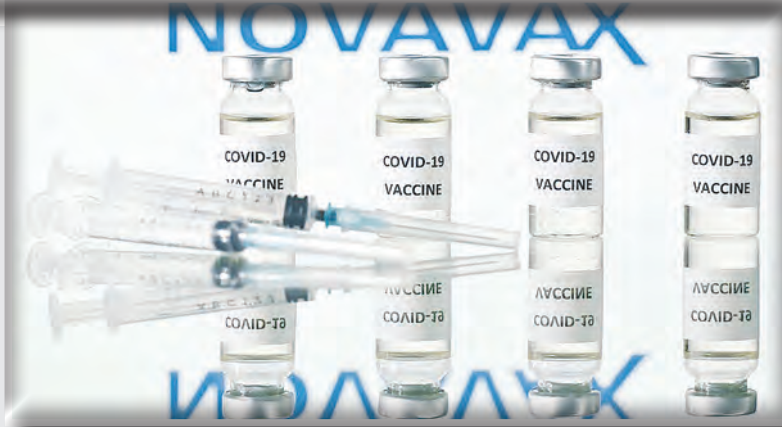
As the pandemic gathers pace again, familiar restrictions are once again being rolled out as fears loom large. The World Economic Forum said it was postponing its annual summit of the world's rich and powerful in the Swiss ski resort of Davos scheduled for January 17-21 due to the new variant.

"Despite the meeting's stringent health protocols, the transmissibility of Omicron and its impact on travel and mobility have made deferral necessary," the WEF said Monday.

And in the U.S., top pandemic adviser Anthony Fauci meanwhile warned of tough times ahead with stretched hospitals and over-optimism about the apparent reduced severity of Omicron.

"One thing that's very clear... is (Omicron's) extraordinary capability of spreading," Fauci told NBC News. "It is just... raging through the world."

"Our hospitals, if things look like they're looking now in the next week or two, are going to be very stressed," particularly in areas of the country with low levels of vaccination, Fauci said.



While a little more than 70 percent of the US population has had at least one shot, another 50 million eligible people remain unprotected, Fauci said.

"With Omicron... it is going to be a tough few weeks to months as we get deeper into the winter," he added.

In Germany, which has tightened restrictions notably affecting the unvaccinated -- who are barred from most public places -- needs fresh measures urgently, a government advisory group said.

"If the spread of the Omicron variant in Germany continues as it has done so far, a significant part of the population will fall sick and/or will go into quarantine simultaneously," a report by the 19-member panel said.

The report did not raise the specter of a new lockdown, but urged "strong reductions in contacts" within the populace in "the coming days".

The Netherlands has imposed a Christmas lockdown and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen has warned that the Omicron variant could be dominant in Europe by mid-January.

Israel's health ministry recommended banning nationals from travelling to the United States, and added several European countries to its Covid "red list".

One of the main problems in the fight against the pandemic is the yawning chasm in vaccinations between developed and poorer countries, notably in Africa, the world's poorest continent.

"As a consequence of the situation, I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyse my options depending on my evolution," he added.

## Yemeni Separated Conjoined Twins Return Home From Jordan



SANAA (Dispatches) - Conjoined twin boys from war-torn Yemen who were successfully separated in surgery in Jordan returned to the capital Sanaa this month, the UN children's agency said on Monday.

Ahmed and Mohammed were born on December 16 last year, joined at the chest and abdomen, in Sanaa, the country's rebel-held capital, UNICEF said.

They were transported to Jordan after urgent calls for their medical evacuation and surgery.

The twins were separated in July at Amman's Specialty Hospital in a nearly eight-hour operation involving 25 surgeons and technical advisers. The twins were seven months old at the time.

Their father, Yasser Albukhaity, was all smiles upon returning to Sanaa on a United Nations medical flight.

"I can't express my feelings," he said, according to the statement, while the agency released pictures of the flight dated December 2.

"There was a feeling of fear at the beginning, but we had great faith in Allah and in the medical team. Thank God the surgery was a big success.

"I wish for them to be educated like other children, to finish their higher studies, and to be of great benefit for their country in the future."

Yemen has been torn by war since 2014, when the Iran-backed Huthi rebels seized Sanaa from the government, which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

The conflict, which the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, has devastated health services in the country.

A UN Development Programme report last month said the war will have claimed 377,000 lives by the end of the year through both direct and indirect impacts.

More than 80 percent of the population of around 30 million require humanitarian assistance.

"This is a welcome happy ending story of one family, but millions of children in Yemen continue to suffer in silence," said Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF's Yemen representative, in a statement.

"In Yemen, today more than ever, children need our support to realize their fundamental rights to health, nutrition, education, protection, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene."

## Russia Ready to Fight for Space Tourism Supremacy

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - After a decade-long hiatus, Russia is relaunching an ambitious bid for dominion over the world's budding space tourism industry, jostling with zealous billionaires, the United States, and rising China.

Russia flaunted its comeback this month dispatching two cosmic adventurers -- Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant -- to the International Space Station (ISS) in its first launch of tourists in 12 years.

Buoyed by the success, firebrand space chief Dmitry Rogozin talked up Russia's next steps to supremacy: a special module at the ISS for Russia's visitors, spacewalks outside the station, and -- down the line -- trips around the moon.

"We will not give this niche to the Americans. We are ready to fight for it," he told reporters at a press conference as Maezawa was blasting towards the ISS on a 12-day mission.

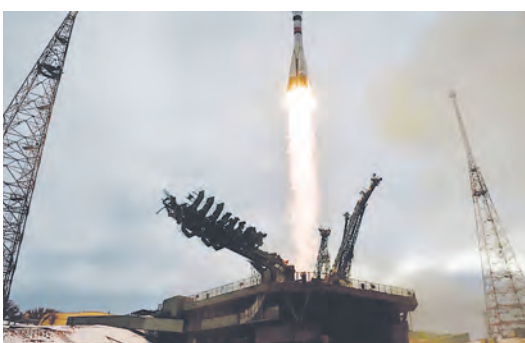
Yet Russia's path to industry dominance is dotted with new obstacles that have emerged since it was last in the game a decade ago.

Back then, the Russian space agency Roscosmos had a monopoly on sending the cash-flushed curious to space.

That changed when U.S. agency NASA retired its own shuttle for astronauts in 2011 and snatched up every seat to the ISS Roscosmos had on offer for the next decade.

Then, last year, billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX barged onto the scene with its first successful ISS mission and NASA dropped Roscosmos.

At a reported \$90 million per seat, this was a huge



financial blow to the cash-strapped Russian space agency, hit simultaneously with budget cuts and corruption scandals.

Analysts say Roscosmos has no choice but to turn to tourism to cover the shortfall.

"The Russian space industry is reliant on consistent orders for these launches," industry analyst

Vitaly Yegorov told AFP.

The price tag for one seat -- estimated at \$50-60 million -- covers the cost of building the three-person Soyuz spacecraft to shuttle the crew, he said, while a second traveller turns a profit.

But space tourism is not just about the money, officials say.

"It's national prestige. It gets young people interested in manned spaceflight. It's the future, after all," says Dmitry Loskutov, head of Glavkosmos -- a subsidiary of Roscosmos responsible for commercial projects, including tourism.

Russia, China and the United States are the only countries capable of manned flights, but a slew of newcomers are entering the scene and forcing Russia to step up its game, SpaceX among them.

Musk has yet to take tourists to the ISS, but this year his Inspiration4 brought an all-civilian crew into Earth's orbit on a three-day mission.

Also eager for a cut are Blue Origin of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and Virgin Galactic of billionaire Richard Branson.

## UNSC Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

"All occupying and uninvited foreign forces must leave that country without any precondition or further delay," Iran's envoy said.

She then referred to a recent report by the New York Times, which said based on newly obtained Pentagon documents that the U.S. military's aerial campaigns in the Middle East have been marked by "deeply flawed intelligence and claimed the lives of thousands of civilians, including many children, without accountability."

According to the report, published by the New York Times on Saturday, a trove of confidential documents covering more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties undercuts Washington's claims of aerial raids with "all-seeing" drones, precision strikes and smart bombs.

The New York Times said U.S. forces carried out more than 50,000 airstrikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria over a five-year period. Iran's envoy said, "The recent reports by the US media about the killing of dozens of Syrian civilians such as farmers, children and villagers, by the United States forces, which, we strongly condemn, indicate the urgency of their withdrawal from Syria."

"The Syrian crisis must be settled peacefully and in accordance with principles of international law, particularly the full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States," she noted.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to support the people and government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country," Ershadi concluded.

## Martyr Soleimani...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile on Monday former head of the Israeli military intelligence Major General Tamir Hayman said the Tel Aviv regime was involved in the 2020 assassination of Martyr Soleimani in the U.S. drone strike near the Iraqi capital's international airport.



"Soleimani's assassination is an achievement, since our main enemy, in my eyes, is the Iranians," Hayman said in an interview with the Malam magazine, published by the Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center.

Hayman's remarks mark the first time a top Israeli official confirms Israel's role in the U.S.-led operation and it once again revealed the dirty nature of the Zionists and the hostilities of them and Westerners towards this "Hero of Hearts".

Martyr Soleimani was the man who was in charge of fighting and destroying the Daesh and also other terrorist groups in the region and for this reason countries in the region and even in the world owe a lot to him their current peace and security in their countries otherwise the Daesh could continue their terrorist attacks. But due to the bravery of Martyr Soleimani and his comrades, the Daesh group was almost destroyed and he turned into an international icon for peace-lovers.

The world takes hats off for the bravery of such a courageous and peace-loving commander who risked his life just for the sake of the security and peace in the region and ultimately for the world. But unfortunately Western media and statesmen have tried to paint a negative picture of this commander of hearts while they have been distorting the truth.

The truth is that all peace-loving and freedom-seeking people in the world consider Martyr Soleimani as hero of hearts and a man against the savagery of the Daesh group which had threatened the countries with their crimes through the support of some countries.

The history will never forget Martyr Soleimani and he will be remembered for ever as a man who sacrificed his life for the sake of peace and security. Now it is expected his martyrdom anniversary to be commemorated in style by Iranians and all those people around the world who back peace and security and owe their current security to this man and his comrades.

Of course Iranians expect the international bodies to bring to justice those who were involved in this crime and this is the least that the international bodies can do for the sake of showing their impartiality and observing the justice in the world.

Martyr of Soleimani has been the man who has fulfilled his vows of defending the country and the region against atrocities and it is time for nation to take its hats off to commemorate his martyrdom in style to show they have not forgotten what he has achieved for the Iranians and other nations.

## Iran to Eliminate...

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking in southern coastal areas of the country, Tangsiri noted that the military forces have reached all preplanned results theoretically and practically, adding that soldiers fired specialized weapons, which was successful in terms of precision.

According to the commander, the IRGC is boasting of using weapons and ammunition, which have been manufactured in Iran, and that they are of very high accuracy. The IRGC forces have also fired ballistic missiles against vessels, facilities and bases of the mock enemy on the second day of the Great Prophet 17 joint drills.

They fired surface-to-surface ballistic missiles against predetermined targets and fully destroyed them.

The military forces also conducted special operations and strategic infiltration and practiced military operations in biological warfare as well as air defense under the umbrella of a unified network. The military drills involve various units of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, such as the aerospace force and the cyber-electronic division, covering the coastlines of the provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan in southern Iran.

## Iran Will Be Soon...

FROM PAGE 1

The minister went on to say that 526 locally produced railway fleets were put into operation on Tuesday.

He stressed that infrastructure in main corridors should be strengthened.

Ghasemi added that a transformation plan is underway to develop the country's transportation.

He assured that Iran would develop significantly in transportation in the next few years. Railway CEO Moad Salehi also pointed out that rail transport is an essential route for economic growth, saying with the support of the President and the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, active wagons on the railway are increasing.



## Zanardi Back Home 18 Months After Horror Accident

ROME (Dispatches) - Alex Zanardi, the former Formula 1 driver who became a Paralympic champion, has returned home to continue his rehabilitation after a horrific road accident in June 2020, his wife Daniela Zanardi announced on Monday. Zanardi underwent carnio-facial reconstruction after suffering serious head injuries when his handbike crashed into an oncoming truck during a race in Tuscany. "Alex was able to leave the hospital a few weeks ago and he is now back with us, at home," Daniela Zanardi said in an interview broadcast by BMW, for whom Zanardi is an ambassador.

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## Kompany Target of Racist Abuse in Belgian Game

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Anderlecht coach Vincent Kompany was left "disgusted" after he said he was the target of racist abuse during Sunday's Belgian league game against Club Brugge. "I leave this match disgusted. My staff and I were insulted during the whole game. Racist insults that were aimed at the players too," said the former Manchester City and Belgium captain. "The day ends badly. I'm going to get together with my staff and the people who matter to me. We should not still have to go through this," he told television broadcaster Eleven after the 2-2 draw.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 22, 2021

# Biennial World Cup Would Raise Extra \$4.4b

ZURICH (Dispatches) - International football leaders were told by FIFA on Monday that a switch to a biennial World Cup would create an extra \$4.4 billion in revenues for the world body.

FIFA is holding a 'global summit' of leaders of national football federations to discuss their proposal to increase the frequency of the World Cup from every four years to every two.

The financial data forms part of an overall feasibility study which FIFA is presenting on Monday. No vote is planned from the event which forms part of FIFA's consultation process.

The upbeat reports are in marked contrast to analysis put forward by critics of the proposals.

There has been opposition from European clubs, the top leagues and European governing body UEFA whose president Aleksander Ceferin has threatened to boycott any additional tournament.

Last month, a report commissioned by the World Leagues Forum said the FIFA proposal, allied with changes to the Club World Cup could cost the big domestic soccer leagues and UEFA around 8 billion euros (\$9 billion) per season in lost TV rights and match day and commercial agreements.

UEFA, on Friday, published a report they had commissioned from consultancy firm Oliver & Ohlbaum which warned that said the changes to the international calendar would impact see revenues for European national federations drop between 2.5 and 3 billion euros (\$3.38 billion) over a four year cycle.

## Odermatt Dominates Giant Slalom

ALTA BADIA (Dispatches) - Switzerland's Marco Odermatt dominated Monday's World Cup giant slalom in Alta Badia to consolidate his lead in the overall standings as last season's crystal globe winner Alexis Pinturault dropped out of contention.

The French skier trailed in 18th and conceded he was out of the running - even though this was only the 12th of 36 events - and would take a time out to try and rediscover his lost form.

Odermatt is shaping up to be the likely recipient of the 2021/22 season's big crystal globe after notching up his fourth win of the campaign.

He capitalized on his first run lead to finish 1.01seconds clear of Italian Luca De Aliprandini.

For the home hope and third-placed German Alexander Schmid, this was a first-ever visit to the World Cup podium.

This latest success lifted Odermatt onto 633 points in the race for the overall title, 228 clear of Matthias Mayer.

Pinturault, who had been placed 12th after the first run, called time on his disappointing title defence which sees him languishing in seventh, a massive 339 points adrift.

"I'm way too far behind, it would be idiotic to try to catch up," he conceded, adding that he would likely give the two end-of-year super-Gs in Bormio a miss.

## Tottenham out of Europe

PARIS (Dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur's European campaign for this season is over after UEFA awarded Rennes a 3-0 victory in their final Europa Conference League group match on Monday.

Spurs were unable to fulfil the December 9 fixture due to a swathe of Covid-19 cases in the squad.

As a result they finish third in the group behind group winners Rennes who progress directly to the last 16 and Dutch side Vitesse who now face Rapid Vienna in a knockout play-off.



The delegates to Monday's summit were told that a report by Italian company Open Economics had found that domestic leagues and UEFA competitions do not have their revenues hurt by national team and international club competition.

The report, some of which has been seen by Reuters, said that revenue of national leagues had increased in years when a major international tournament was held.

Professor Pasquale Lucio Scandizzo, of OpenEconomics told the delegates that the plan "promises significant and positive net macroeconomic benefits, distributed over time and space".

A report from Nielsen predicted that the plan would see revenues rise from an expected \$7 billion - for a 48 tournament - to \$11.4 billion over a four year cycle thanks to increased ticket receipts and media rights and sponsorship revenues.

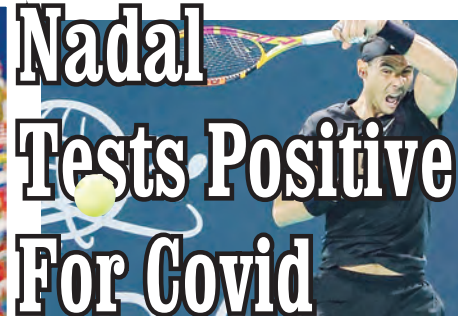
FIFA officials told the delegates that \$3.5 billion of the extra revenue would go to a new 'Member Association Solidarity Fund' with each national federation allocated around \$16 million in a four year period, while extra funds would also be given to the FIFA Forward Program for development projects.

FIFA said that the funds would help reduce the gap in revenues between the developed and less developed football markets.

Any vote on the plans would likely involve all the 211 national associations.

Along with UEFA, South American confederation CONMEBOL has opposed the proposal.

Earlier this month, Victor Montagliani, president of North and Central American and Caribbean confederation CONCACAF, told Reuters that a compromise solution could be for an additional tournament to be a revamped version of the old Confederations Cup rather than a full World Cup with a separate qualifying process.



MADRID (Dispatches) - Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal said Monday he had tested positive for Covid-19, which puts in doubt his participation in the Australian Open next month where was was expected to make his big comeback after months of injury.

The Spanish former world number one said he took the test when he returned to Spain from Abu Dhabi where he took part in an exhibition tournament last week, his first since August due to a foot injury.

"I am going through some unpleasant moments but I trust that I will improve little by little. I am now confined at home and have informed the people who had been in contact with me," he wrote on Twitter.

"As a consequence of the situation, I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyse my options depending on my evolution," he added.

"I will keep you informed of any decisions about my future tournaments."

The 35-year-old had been due to fly to Melbourne later this month to compete in an ATP event ahead of the Australian Open which begins at Melbourne Park on January 17.

## Raducanu Voted BBC Sports Personality of the Year



The 19-year-old was also the first British woman to claim a major title since Virginia Wade triumphed at Wimbledon in 1977.

Raducanu beat off competition from diver Tom Daley, who was second, and swimmer Adam Peaty in third place, plus boxer Tyson Fury, football player Raheem Sterling and

Para-cyclist Sarah Storey to win the award.

"It's such an honor just to be amongst these nominees. To win is pretty amazing," said Raducanu, who also reached the fourth round at Wimbledon this year on her Grand Slam debut.

"The energy this year playing at Wimbledon in front of my home crowd — that was something I've never felt before."

"I've watched Sports Personality of the Year growing up and it's an honor to be amongst those past winners.

"I'm happy for British tennis as well and that we've managed to get this award... again." Britain's Andy Murray was the last tennis player to win the award in 2016 after claiming the trophy in 2015 and 2013.

Skateboarder Sky Brown took home the Young Sports Personality of the Year award after the 13-year-old won the Olympic bronze for Britain in the women's park skateboarding final at the 2020 Tokyo Games.

## Australia Clinch Second Ashes Test

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Australia ground down a battling England to win the second Test in Adelaide Monday and go 2-0 up in the Ashes series, leaving the visitors' dreams of winning back the hallowed urn in tatters.

England resumed day five of the pink ball Test in deep trouble at 82 for four chasing a massive 468 to win, needing a miracle to salvage a draw.

They gamely hung on into the final session, fighting a desperate rearguard action until ultimately crumbling to be all out for 192, crashing to a 275-run defeat.

Jhye Richardson was the pick of the attack with 5-42.

England slumped by nine wickets in the first Test at Brisbane and the loss this week means their hopes of winning back a trophy they last secured on Australian turf in 2010-11 are all but over.

Joe Root's men will head to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test starting Sunday knowing that the only instance of a team coming from 2-0 down to win the Ashes was Donald Bradman's Australia way back in 1936-37.

With Root, the world's number one Test batsmen, removed by Mitchell Starc in the final over on Sunday evening, England's hopes appeared to rest with allrounder Ben Stokes.

The 30-year-old has so often rescued his team, with memories of his match-winning exploits against Australia at Headingley in 2019 to keep that series alive still fresh.

But trying to nurse England's batting through 90 overs against Australia's relentless bowling was too big a task, even for him.

He put his head down and lasted 77 balls for 12 runs before Nathan Lyon struck. The umpire initially gave the lbw shout not out, but Australia reviewed and it was shown to be plumb in front.



## Bayern President Rules Out Signing Haaland

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich president Herbert Hainer ruled out bidding for Dortmund striker Erling Haaland and hopes record-breaking forward Robert Lewandowski finishes his career with the Bavarian giants.

Hainer told broadcaster Sport1 that FC Bayern will not sign Haaland "because we have Robert Lewandowski".

The Poland striker, 34 next August, has a Bayern contract until 2023 and Hainer has "told him often enough" that club officials hold him in "high esteem".

Haaland, 21, is under contract at Dortmund until 2024, but could leave in 2022 when a release clause in his contract, reportedly for around €80 million (RM379.4 million), becomes active.

The Norwegian has scored 76 goals in 75 Dortmund games since January 2020 and is regarded as one of the hottest properties in European football.

Mino Raiola, Haaland's agent, recently said there is a "great chance that Erling will leave" at the end of the season, naming Bayern, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester City as possible destinations.

But Hainer has made it clear Bayern are extremely happy with Lewandowski, who joined on a free transfer from Dortmund in 2014.

Lewandowski is the Bundesliga's top scorer this season with 19 goals and has netted 324 times in 354 Bayern appearances.

He scored in Friday's 4-0 thrashing of Wolfsburg to set a new record of 43 Bundesliga goals in a calendar year.

