

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 131,400 With 52 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

More Than 5.36m Tons of Basic Commodities Were Transported From Five Port Cities of the Country To the Designated Destinations During the First Nine Months of the Current Iranian Calendar Year

2 DOMESTIC

Vice-Speaker Meets Malaysian Counterpart



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Iranian Banks' Loans To Firms up 59%



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

Sudan Forces Fire Tear Gas as Protesters Head To Presidential Palace



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Rangnick Questions Practicality of Two Cup Competitions in England



> SEE PAGE 8

Paris Accused of Throwing Wrench In Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An informed source has shed light on France's attempts to throw a wrench in the latest round of talks in Vienna between Iran and the P4+1 countries, saying Paris' two-day absence in the negotiations helped the negotiating sides make progress in preparing drafts.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the source told IRNA news agency that the French negotiating team did not play a "constructive" role in the negotiations and that it significantly slowed down the pace talks by throwing a wrench in the process.

"The presence of French representatives at the G7 foreign ministers summit in Liverpool and their two-day absence at a time when delegations in Vienna were working on the drafts in the previous round of negotiations led to significant progress. However, after their return from Liverpool, a disruptive trend started again," he said.

"The drafts had reached an acceptable level [of agreement], but following the return of the French envoys from the Liverpool conference and their expression of opposition to the drafts, the course of the talks was disrupted. This gave rise to certain arguments in the internal meeting of the P4+1 countries."

See Page 7

Tehran, Muscat Seek Boosting All-Out Ties



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The 8th meeting of the Joint Strategic Consultation Committee of Iran and Oman was held in the presence of Iran deputy foreign minister for political affairs and Oman deputy foreign minister for diplomat affairs on Saturday.

During the meeting, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani and Omani Deputy Foreign Minister for Diplomat Affairs Sheikh Khalifa al-Harthy pointed to the 50th anniversary of the establishment of relations between the two countries, expressing satisfaction with the level of relations between Iran and Oman.

Emphasizing the need to resolve regional issues by the countries of the region, Ali Bagheri Kani expressed hope that the existing problems will be resolved based on dialogue between the countries of the region.

Referring to the pivotal role of Iran in regional developments, Sheikh Khalifa al-Harthy said that his country, as in the past, is interested in developing bilateral and regional relations.

He added that Oman considers peaceful paths necessary for peace and tranquility in the region.

Iran-Oman relations, which have regional and trans-regional influences, will continue, he noted.

In addition to bilateral issues, the two sides discussed various regional and international issues, including the Vienna talks, the need for a political solution to the crisis in Yemen, and the region's need for dialogue.

At the end of the meeting, the minutes of the 8th meeting of the Joint Strategic Consultation Committee of Iran and Oman was signed by the deputy foreign ministers of the two countries.

In recent weeks several Omani officials have arrived in Tehran to meet Iranian officials to boost ties with Iran. Two weeks ago ranking commanders from Iran and Oman weighed plans for the promotion of military cooperation between the two neighbors and joint action in the fight against terrorism.

Heading a military delegation, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultanate of Oman's Armed Forces for Operations and Planning Brigadier General Staff Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Mandhari met with Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri in Tehran.

The meeting was held as part of plans to expand the military and international cooperation between Tehran and Muscat.

Then days after this meeting, Iranian and Omani armed forces held a joint military drill and last week an economic meeting between the business activists of the two countries was held at Iran's chamber of commerce.

Oman has been one of the close friends of Iran in the Persian Gulf.

Industries Called on to Invest in Iran Oil Industry

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for planning Houshang Falahatian has called on the country's major industries especially the steel industry, to invest in gas sector development projects, Shana reported.

Falahatian has criticized the imbalance of development between oil and gas industries and noted that the country's gas sector currently requires over \$80 billion on investment.

According to the official, if the current trend continues, the natural gas shortage in the country during the cold months of the year will increase from 200 million cubic meters per day to about 250 million cubic meters in the Iranian calendar year 1404 (begins in March 2025) and more than 350 million cubic meters in 1410 (starts in March 2031).

Stating that the study of gas consumption in the steel industry over the past four years shows an annual growth of about 13.7 percent, Falahatian added: "This is while the average annual growth of gas consumption in the petrochemical and cement industries in the said period, has been 8.1 percent and 5.5 percent, respectively, and the average growth of natural gas injection into the national gas network was 5.2 percent."

See Page 7

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

One World and One Zionist Regime

The Zionist regime since the creation of fake country of Israel has always acted against the world and it has committed crimes under full support of its founders, the British and Americans, and despite the world protests and anger, it has continued its crimes comfortably without any punishment.

According to reports, an overwhelming majority of 125 countries have backed an unprecedented open-ended war crime investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) against Israel, including into the 11-day Israeli deadly aggression on the besieged Gaza Strip earlier this year.

In May, the military of the Israeli regime bombarded the besieged Gaza Strip for 11 consecutive days, killing at least 260 Palestinians, including 66 children. In the aftermath of the brutal war, the 47-member UNHRC initially approved a probe into the crimes committed by the occupying entity against the inhabitants of the impoverished enclave.

Its broad mandate allows for a thorough probe into the human rights violations committed by the Israeli military on either side of the so-called Green Line, which includes Israel, the occupied West Bank and the blockaded Gaza Strip.

Later, Israel asked to defund the probe by excluding the money for the probe from the overall UNHRC budget.

The matter was put to vote before the 193-member UN General Assembly on Thursday night and Israel's proposed amendment was massively rejected 125-8, with 34 abstentions.

Israel itself and the United States, as it was expected, were among the few that voted against the approval of a budget for that investigation.

Palestine calls on the ICC to expedite an investigation into the crimes of the Tel Aviv regime and extremist Jewish settlers in the occupied lands, and bring perpetrators to justice.

After the vote, Palestine's Permanent Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour commended the vote and all UN member states that rejected Israel's proposal, Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported.

He also thanked the UNGA for approving all budgets of the programs relating to the Palestinian cause, including his request to increase funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). **See Page 7**

First Train En Route To Turkey From Pakistan Crosses Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - The first train that had embarked on a trip from Pakistan to Turkey crossed Iran after an agreement was reached between Tehran and Islamabad to develop economic cooperation in November.

Advisor to Prime Minister of Pakistan for Commerce and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood visited Tehran to attend the 9th meeting of Joint Iran-Pakistan Trade Committee on November 17. Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi, who headed the Iranian delegation at the meeting of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Economic Commission in November emphasized facilitating economic relations between the two countries.

One of the issues discussed at the meeting between the Iranian and Pakistani sides was the passage of Pakistani lorries through Iran to Turkey and Europe, as well as the passage of Iranian lorries through Pakistan to China.

It was reported then that the Pakistani side stressed the need to facilitate the passage of its lorries through Iran and the Iranian side, in return, promised to contribute to the plan and it was decided to facilitate the passage of lorries between the two countries with the aim of developing transit of goods and trade between Iran and Pakistan. The meeting also discussed the Iranian side's proposal for rail transportation from Pakistan to Turkey, Turkmenistan and finally to Europe.

The expansion of international flights between Iran and Pakistan was another focus of the meeting.

Int'l Community Urged to Protect Palestinians Against Zionists' Crimes

GAZA (Dispatches) - The Palestinian Authority is urging the international community to intervene to protect Palestinians in the face of increasing settler violence that has left hundreds injured in the West Bank in recent days.

The Authority says the Israeli regime must be held to account for a surge in what it called terrorist attacks by settlers against defenseless Palestinians.

Meantime, Palestinian factions are calling for the formation of local protection committees across the West Bank.

On Saturday night, Israeli settlers and troops attacked the village of Burqa, injuring nearly 250 people during fierce clashes with Palestinians. Soldiers targeted them with live bullets, rubber-coated rounds, stun grenades and teargas.

The village has been a flashpoint of clashes in recent days. It sits near the site of a former settlement. The Israeli military destroyed that settlement in 2005. But now the settlers say they want to return.

Hamas praised residents of Burqa for resisting the Israeli incursion on Saturday, calling on Palestinians in the West Bank and in al-Quds to show support for the village.

The confrontations "by our heroes... are just an initial message, and the enemy must prepare for a comprehensive battle with all our people, to defeat and uproot the occupation and settlements," Abd al-Hakim Huneini, a senior official in the resistance group's West Bank division, said in a statement.

Palestinian groups and activists also warned that Israel's practices and settler "assaults" against Palestinians in the West Bank will lead to a new intifada (uprising).

Some Palestinian activists said the intifada has already begun and called for escalating "popular resistance" against the Israeli troops and settlers.

"The intifada is already here," said a senior activist belonging to the ruling Fatah faction. "What we are witnessing in the West Bank is similar to what happened during the First Intifada," which erupted in 1987.

Another activist affiliated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)'s Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine said the growing resentment in the West Bank was also directed toward the Palestinian Authority.

"Many people are angry because the Palestinian Authority is not doing anything to defend them against increasing attacks by the Israeli army and the settlers," the activist said. Hamas and other Palestinian factions, meanwhile, renewed their call for stepping up "all forms of resistance" against Israel.

See Page 7

Sokhan Gostar Institute

IRAN NEWS

PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN



Advertisement Department
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

Two IRGC Forces Martyred in Clashes With Armed Outlaws

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Two members of the Ground Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) have lost their lives in clashes with armed outlaws in southeastern Iran.

The IRGC Ground Force's Quds Base announced in a statement on Sunday that Mehran Shourizadeh and Mohsen Kaykhaa'i lost their lives on duty the night before in the southeastern city of Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan-and-Baluchestan.

The United States and its regional allies extend support to armed groups seeking to cause insecurity and create havoc along the borders.

Vice-Speaker Meets Malaysian Counterpart

TEHRAN (MNA) – Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament has said that Iran-Malaysia parliamentary cooperation in international parliamentary bodies could serve the interests of the two countries.

Ali Nikzad, Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament made the comments in a meeting with his Malaysian counterpart, Rashid Hasnon in Tehran on Saturday.

In the meeting, Nikzad said that the Iranian parliament welcomes enhancing cooperation between the two parliaments as well as exchanging experiences on legislation and supervisory role of the two parliaments.

Nikzad further comprehensively explained Iran's parliament structure, stages of passing a law and other duties of the Parliament.

Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament pointed out that Parliamentary cooperation of the two countries in international parliamentary assemblies can serve the interests of both countries.

He also stressed the need to enhance economic cooperation particularly in energy and new technologies fields and expressed hope that the joint effort of the Iranian and Malaysian officials would lead to the promotion of trade level exchanges.

Mohd Rashid Hasnon, in turn, elaborated on the Malaysian parliament and emphasized



the need for continuous talks between the Parliament members of the two countries.

He further noted that parliamentary friendship groups of the two nations play a prominent role in exchanging experiences between the two countries' parliaments, expressing hope for further exchanges between members of the Iran-Malaysia parliamentary friendship groups after the Covid-19 pandemic is over.

Hasnon stated that Malaysia welcomes the boost in economic exchanges, adding, facilitating banking cooperation will play a circular role in this regard.

He also pointed to the dialogue between the banking officials of the two countries as a possible solution to resolve obstacles.

Iran Committed to Political Resolution of Regional Issues

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Republic is committed to dialog and adoption of political solutions to resolve regional problems, Iran's foreign minister says, underlining Tehran's readiness to hold talks with regional countries to boost bilateral ties.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Issa al-Harthy, the Omani Foreign Ministry's under-secretary for diplomatic affairs, in Tehran on Saturday.

Amir-Abdollahian said improving and expanding relations with neighboring countries is Ebrahim Raisi administration's foreign policy priority, noting that Iran attaches great importance to its ties with Oman as a neighbor.

He also underscored the need for bilateral efforts to enhance the volume of trade between the two countries so that it reaches the level of friendly relations between the two sides.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the top Iranian diplomat expressed hope that the efforts made by all regional countries, especially Iran and Oman, would pave the way for an end to the Yemeni crisis.

For his part, al-Harthy also hoped that the Yemeni crisis would end as soon as possible, adding that his country welcomes peaceful, diplomatic ways to reduce regional issues.

The Omani diplomat is in Iran for a meeting of the Iran-Oman joint strategic consultative committee.

In recent years, Iran has sought to expand its trade relations with regional countries, defying US plots to isolate the country through sanctions.

The Raisi administration has especially focused on developing closer relations with neighboring countries. Trade between Tehran and Muscat has steadily increased in 2021.

Gorgan Hosts 16th Specialized Exhibition of Furniture, Chandeliers

GORGAN (IP) - The 16th specialized exhibition of furniture, chandeliers and interior decoration was held in Gorgan, North Central Iran.

The 16th specialized exhibition of furniture, chandeliers and interior decoration was held for four days at the permanent venue of Gorgan International Exhibitions, the capital of Golestan province.

The 16th specialized exhibition of furniture and chandeliers with the participation of about 60 top manufacturing companies from Golestan, Mazandaran, Tehran, Semnan, Alborz, Zanjan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Isfahan provinces has been held since last Wednesday until Sunday and these companies showcased their latest furniture and chandelier products.

Furniture and chandeliers are among the most widely used goods in Iran to beautify homes more and more, and companies with leading brand and style are active in the field of furniture and chandeliers in the country.

300 Documents Presented to Iraqi Officials on Martyrdom of Soleimani

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Judiciary Chief for International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said that Iran has presented some 300 of its documents on the assassination of Martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani to the Iraqi officials and reached an agreement that the exchange of documents will continue.

Addressing a press conference on investigating the assassination of Martyr Soleimani, Gharibabadi said that almost two years passes since the terrorist act that led to the martyrdom of Lieutenant General Soleimani, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and their companions in Iraq; the Islamic Republic of Iran's major defined priority in legal and judiciary field is surveying the criminal case in Iranian and Iraqi judiciary courts.

"It was agreed that a joint Iranian-Iraqi committee will be established comprising the judiciary delegations of the two countries to begin their surveys," he added.

Gharibabadi said that the first joint committee performed its task in Iraq within a month and a joint communique was issued, adding that the 2nd round was held in Tehran on December 21 and negotiated with the Iranian judiciary delegation.

Gharibabadi said that Iran's objective is both accelerating surveys of the case at Iranian courts of justice, and since the crime has occurred in Iraq, the case will speedily be surveyed speedily Iraqi judiciary criminal courts.

He pointed out that the ongoing investigations surveys will not be the final investigations, since besides the Americans involved in this case, there are some real and legal entities in this files that the accusations against them must be surveyed, because both Iran and Iraq are determined that the entire involved suspects, in this case, must be pursued.

Iran, Iraq to Discuss Shalamcheh-Basra Railway Project

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi arrived in Baghdad to meet and hold talks with Iraqi officials on various areas of cooperation between the two countries in the transportation sector.

Ghasemi arrived in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad late Saturday and was welcomed by the Technical Director of the Iraqi Ministry of Transport.

The Iranian minister also met and held talks with the Director-General of the Iraqi Railways Company and the Director-General of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning to discuss the ways of developing cooperation of the two countries in various fields including railway and exchanging experiences.

Ghasemi expressed satisfaction with his official visit to Baghdad and the great efforts of the Iraqi government to implement investment and economic projects as well as strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

He is scheduled to meet and hold talks with his Iraqi counterpart on a 4-day visit to Iraq as well as Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and President Barham Salih. The minister is also set to hold meetings with some Iraqi governors including governors of Najaf, Karbala, Babylon, Al-Qadisiyah and Basra.

The implementation of the Shalamcheh-Basra railway project is one of the topics that will be discussed during the visit of the Iranian minister to Iraq.

CBI Urged to Accelerate Allocation of Working Capital for Production Units

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei has called on Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Ali Saleh-Abadi to accelerate the formation of a special bank account for allocation of working capital to production units.

Shafei made the remarks in a meeting of the representatives of the country's private sector with Salehi on Sunday. The meeting was attended by the ICCIMA board of directors, as well as the heads and representatives of economic organizations, heads of provincial chambers of commerce, and some of the country's businessmen and entrepreneurs.

Speaking at this gathering, Shafei underlined the significance of close communication between the CBI governor and the country's private sector and said: "From the private sector's point of view, most of the current problems and difficulties in the country's economy can be solved by the central bank and the presence of the head of this institution in a meeting with ICCIMA is a big step to resolve such problems."

According to the official, unpredictability, and changes of raw materials prices, the difficulty of financing, and instability of business policies, rules, and regulations have been the three main factors that contributed the most to a severe business environment over the past three years.

Noting that an important part of these problems can be resolved by CBI and the expectations of the private sector are high in this regard, Shafei addressed some of the inefficiencies in the country's monetary and banking system that have the greatest impact on national production and export development.

"The first major problem is the diversion of banking facilities from productive activities. According to the central bank, the share of banking facilities allocated to the productive sectors, including industry, mining, and agriculture, accounted for only 40 percent of the total bank facilities paid last year," he said.

The ICCIMA head said that the second factor preventing growth in production and export development was the lack of full implementation of the law on removing barriers to competitive production and improving the country's financial system.

Elsewhere in the meeting, CBI Governor Ali Saleh-Abadi pointed to the positive economic outlooks for the coming years, saying that the bank is going to issue a new directive in the near future for supporting exports.

The official stated that the details of the directive have been decided on in meetings with Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Fatemi Amin.

"We have formed a joint working group with the Industry Ministry and we have held regular meetings; this interaction will continue with the cooperation of the private sector," Saleh-Abadi added.

He also noted that the CBI is optimistic about the country's export revenues and foreign currency supply for import of basic goods in the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 21, 2022).

Christian Prisoners in Iran Get Furlough for Christmas

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei granted Christian inmates a 10-day leave on the occasion of Christmas.

The top Iranian judge has given the courts and attorney generals across the country a new directive on permitting Christian prisoners to get a furlough for 10 days on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ (PBUH).

The Judiciary chief has cited the "positive and constructive" effects of the prisoners' reunion with their families.

The furlough, however, does not apply to inmates convicted of espionage, acting against national security, organized crimes, disruption of economic system, armed robbery, and kidnapping.

Christmas or Christmas Day is an annual commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated generally on December 25 as a religious and cultural holiday by millions of people around the world.

Iran Wants Lasting Peace, Stability in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian President's special envoy for Afghanistan Kazemi Qomi said that Tehran wants lasting stability, peace, security and formation of an inclusive government with the participation of all groups and parties in Afghanistan.

"Iran has friendly relations with all political factions in Afghanistan and is interested in mediating between all groups and parties of Afghanistan in order to establish peace, stability and an inclusive government with the participation of all," said Kazemi Qomi in his meeting with Mohammad Mohaqiq, a member of the leadership of the Supreme Council of National Resistance of Afghanistan.

"Tehran stands for lasting stability and security in Afghanistan and calls for a peaceful solution to the Afghan issue through negotiations between all political and ethnic parties in Afghanistan," he added, saying that security and stability in Afghanistan will be in the interest of the whole world and the region.

Mohammad Mohaqiq, for his part, said that the council doesn't want violence and war and is willing to hold constructive talks to resolve the country's disputes if the ground for intra-Afghan negotiations is provided.

He thanked the government of Iran for playing a positive role in Afghanistan and the long-term hosting of millions of Afghan refugees.

Mohaqiq also appreciated the recent remarks of the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raeisi, about the need to seriously address the situation of immigrants.

Earlier in his first visit to Afghanistan, Kazemi Qomi met with senior Taliban officials.

22nd Abu Reyhan Biruni Research Festival Wraps Up

TEHRAN (IP) - The 22nd Abu Reyhan Biruni Research Festival ended its activities in two national and international sections by introducing the nominees in Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences.

At the closing ceremony, held on Sunday at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, festival's president Afshin Zarghi said: "Creating a platform and promoting the relationship between industry and university is one of the goals of holding the festival; today, the university of medical sciences has six growth centers and 128 knowledge-based companies are located in the university and the number of their products exceeds 200."

"Products such as kits and medicines are among them, and some of which have also been unveiled," he added.

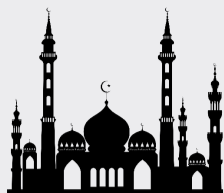
"Today, 221 local and 23 foreign inventions have been registered in Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, which is of great importance," he stated.

President of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Alireza Zali, also noted that the festival is an excellent opportunity to model the Iranian heritage."

Regarding the personal life of Abu Reyhan Biruni, Zali pointed out that Biruni was a prominent writer and poet and did not stop researching even when traveling.

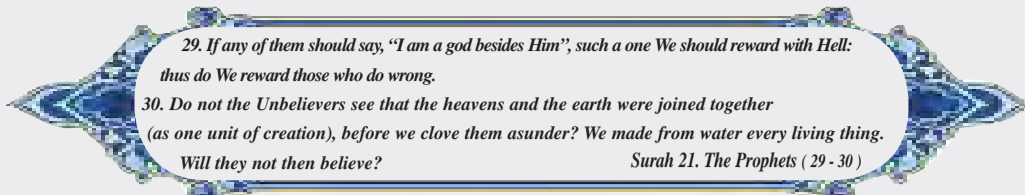
"11,000 written documents have been attributed to Abu Reyhan Biruni, which is definitely more than this and a large volume of it has been lost," he stated.

He noted that Abu Reyhan has a special place in the Iranian culture, and his outstanding works can still be referred to in today's models.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:18
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:43
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:13



Iranian Banks' Loans To Firms up 59%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian banks paid nearly \$57.8 billion in loans to firms between March and November.



Iran has seen a major growth in activity in its manufacturing and mining sectors in recent years amid government's efforts to provide more support to the industries to both offset the impacts of American sanctions and to create more jobs for the country's youth.

The government has offered cheap and long-term loans to manufacturers and owners of mines and metals companies to encourage exports from the sectors.

CBI figures showed that total loans paid by Iranian banks to manufacturers and to the metals and mining firms over the March-November period had amounted to 5,157 trillion rials (\$17.24 billion).

Businesses and companies in the Iranian services sector had received the largest chunk of bank loans over the period at more than 7,329 trillion rials, said the CBI, adding that loans given to the trade sector had reached 2,665 trillion rials.

IME Posts Monthly Rise in Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) in last Iranian calendar month of Azar witnessed trade of 8,376,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of almost \$2,443m, with volume and value of trades in the oil and petrochemical trading floor going up by 7% and 5% respectively, as compared to the figures of the previous month.



According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the exchange sold on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor more than 1,460,000 tons of commodities worth more than \$940m.

On this floor the exchange traded 450,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 420,000 tons of bitumen, 396,000 tons of polymeric products, 191,000 tons of lube cut, 133,000 tons of chemicals, 26,000 tons of sulfur, 20,000 tons of oil, 3,800 tons of slops wax, 550 tons of argon and 48 tons of insulation.

Next was the metals and minerals trading floor with trades of 6,701,000 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$1,476m.

Commodities changing hand on this floor included 4,643,000 tons of cement, 1,511,000 tons of steel, 241,000 tons of iron ore, 201,000 tons of sponge iron, 41,000 tons of aluminum, 35,000 tons of zinc, 33,000 tons of copper, 12,000 tons of cast iron, 540 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 400 tons of coke, 81 tons of precious metals concentrate and 16 kg of gold bars.

It's worth noting that the IME also played host to trade of 34,095 tons of non-exchange-listed commodities on its side market.

Domestic Capabilities Can Attain High-Speed, Quality Network

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of information and communications technology hoped to create a high-speed and high-quality network across the country by relying on domestic capacities.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 22nd Telecom Exhibition at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds, Issa Zarepour said: "People's lives during the coronavirus outbreak were tied to the technology and communications. The opportunity was fostered, and all services were made available to the people."

The 22nd Telecom Exhibition indicated the achievements of Iran's communication infrastructure fields, he pointed out, stressing that suitable measures were taken in this regard.

Zarepour visited the 22nd Telecom Exhibition at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds on Saturday, December 24, 2021.

Attending his first press conference on December 18, he had talked about the national information network the ministry is seeking to establish:

"The National Information Network is a big project, parts of which have been implemented in the last 8 years, and we have made about 35 to 40 percent progress," he stated.

"Establishing the National Information Network does not mean cutting off access to the global Internet, but it involves the time when the country wants to connect with international communications, use its maximum capacity and have a good experience in the future," he noted.

Iranian Engineer Invents Device for Alarming Earthquake

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian computer engineer has invented a device for alarming the approximate time and place of earthquake which can save the lives of people.

On the occasion of the National Day of Safety Against Earthquake and also devastating 2003 Bam Earthquake anniversary, Middle East Knowledge Management Institute held a press conference under the banner of "Futures Studies of Earthquake Crisis Management" where the Iranian engineer unveiled its invention of a device for detection and warning of the approximate time and place of the possible earthquake.

Farhad Samandari, the Iranian talent and engineer, addressing the participants in the presser delved into details of his invention and said he has patented his invention but he needs the government support for its launch. He said that this system of warning will be based on the animal senses, adding that snake and fish have strong senses of feeling the danger and any developments in the earth, and his system will function based on this sense and by implanting special sensors in snake and fish or any other animal which has strong sense of feeling the threats.

He went on to say that by the launch of a data center, it will get the signals from the certain animals with implanted sensors and then will transfer it to the crisis management headquarters for further actions.

He admitted that his invention and idea is waiting for financial support to be launched because such devices are necessary for the country which is located on the earthquake belt.



Meanwhile, addressing the presser, official in the public participation of Tehran City Council Mr. Talebinejad called for organizing participation of the people during the crisis like earthquake. He added that even the National Crisis Management Headquarters is shocked and loses its control during the earthquake. He said we are in the 21th Century and we cannot stick to the old traditional public participation and the country needs a modern and organized way of public participation during the crisis. He reiterated that five factors of culture, body, logistic, norms and determination of the executor of the program are important in the public participation and as long as this participation is not organized, all efforts will be in vain.

Then Mr. Maziar Mir, for his part, talked about the principles of the crisis management and said since the country is located on the earthquake belt, the education is very important for such critical time. He admitted that education in this regard is very weak in the country and hailed Iranian scientists like Mr. Samandari who sacrifice themselves for the success of the country. He then called for education and deployment of crisis management offices in any part of the country.

Dr. Zolfaghari was the other speaker in this presser who called for supporting the knowledge-based and start-ups companies for tackling this issue and preparing the country for any disaster. Majlis lawmaker Mr. Nikzad also criticized the bodies which are in charge of managing crisis and called for improvement of their performance. He went on to say that since 2003 that Bam earthquake happened and killed thousands of people, one can still see rubbles and wreckage of that disaster in the city. By the way he said people of Bam despite all problems are ready to host tourists from any part of the country.

Iran to Resume Car Production Abroad

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian minister of industry's visit to Syria to follow up resumption of car production in the Arab country as well as Iranians' efforts to pave the ground for resuming automotive assembly line in Senegal enhance hopes for export of Iran-manufactured cars.

Iran's car manufacturing industry has suffered from various challenges and problems in recent years, but Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Fatemi Amin believes that problems such as accumulated losses, improper pricing strategy, debt to auto spare parts manufacturers, and inappropriate supply chain do not mean that Iranians should abandon the industry.

The minister plans to increase car manufacturing, as he repeated that Iran is going to produce 1.6 million cars in the next Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022 to March 20, 2023), hoping that the production is expected to increase to three million cars within four years.

The administration of President Ebrahim Raisi plans to export 30 percent of the cars to be produced at that time, Fatemi Amin told IRNA.

The Islamic Republic possesses production lines and sites in Senegal, Republic of Azerbaijan, Syria, and Iraq, which are being developed one by one, and that they can be used to expand Iran's export capabilities of exporting technological products and services.

The minister also said that the car production line of Iran Khodro Automaker Company (IKCO), which was closed for a while, has restarted work since last week.

Instead of exporting cars, Iran can export spare parts to Syria, Senegal, Iraq, and Azerbaijan Republic in order to avoid tariff obstacles, he mentioned.

IKCO deputy director for export and international affairs Kianoush Pourmojib told IRNA that following extension of tariff exemption convention by the Senegalese Government, Iran Khodro can pave the ground for resuming production activities in the African country.

Head of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce Keyvan Kashefi told IRNA that import of cars from all countries to Syria was prohibited in recent years because the Arab state has been facing economic woes since the start of conflicts in 2011.

Iran is exporting semi-knocked-down kit (SKD) cars such as Samand and Dena to Republic of Azerbaijan. A joint car manufacturing company was established 168 kilometers south of Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, three years ago, which has the capacity to produce 10,000 cars.

Iran's SAIPA Automaker Company exported 211 CBUs and 1,080 SKDs from March 21 to October 22.

High Quality Products the Biggest Achievement of ESCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - Head of Supreme Leader's Office at Islamic Azad University Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Sharifani paid a visit to Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) and during his visit he hailed the company and said production of high quality goods which are need in the country is the biggest achievement of the company.

Sharifani said that every year the representatives of the office in each unit of the university hold a meeting wherein the participants exchange their views on the existing problems and offering their solutions. He added currently and due to the significance of the link between industry and university and key role of ESCO in industry and especially in the national steel country and for boosting awareness of his colleagues about the latest progresses, researches and production developments of ESCO, this company has been chosen for this meeting.

He went on to say that ESCO is one of the biggest and advanced industries of the company and representatives of the Supreme Leader's office in the Islamic Azadi University will transfer their information and findings as well as efforts of the company's staff in the meeting to the teachers and students.

He reiterated that production of high quality products required by the country is the biggest achievement for ESCO.



La Palma Volcano Eruption Declared Over

MADRID (Dispatches) - Scientists declared the eruption on Spain's La Palma officially over on Saturday, allowing islanders to breathe a sigh of relief nearly 100 days after the Cumbre Vieja volcano began to spew out lava, rock and ash and upended the lives of thousands.

After bursting into action on Sept. 19, the volcano suddenly went quiet on Monday Dec. 13 but the authorities, wary of raising false hope, held off until Christmas Day to give the all-clear.

"What I want to say today can be said with just four words: The eruption is over," Canary Islands regional security chief Julio Perez told a news conference on Saturday.



Lebanon's Top Christian Cleric Issues Elections Plea

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's top Christian cleric, Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, stressed the importance of the country holding legislative elections next year as he delivered his Christmas sermon on Saturday.

Al-Rai also called for the government to convene, saying that failing to do so sets a precedent that may hinder the function of future governments.

Lebanon's cabinet, which is focused on restarting talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to unlock much-needed foreign aid, has not met since Oct. 12, due to a dispute over a probe into last year's deadly Beirut port blast.



Sudan Forces Fire Tear Gas as Protesters Head to Presidential Palace



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Protesters opposed to military rule on Saturday reached the vicinity of the presidential palace in the capital of Khartoum for the second time in a week, television images showed, despite heavy tear gas and a communications black out.

A Reuters witness said Sudanese security forces fired tear gas to disperse the crowds on a tenth day of major demonstrations since an Oct. 25 coup.

Protests have continued even after Abdallah Hamdok was reinstated as prime minister last month.

A week ago, demonstrators managed to begin a sit-in at the gates of the palace, but on Saturday they were met with rows of security forces.

Internet services were disrupted in the capital, Khartoum, and locals were unable to make or receive domestic calls on Saturday, the witnesses said, while soldiers and Rapid Support Forces blocked roads leading to bridges linking Khartoum with Omdurman, its sister city across the Nile river. People still managed to post images on social media showing protests taking place in several other cities including Madani and Atbara.

In neighbouring Omdurman, security forces also fired tear gas at protesters around 2 kilometres (1.24 miles) away from a bridge connecting the city to central Khartoum, another Reuters witness said.

The SUNA state news agency reported that the province of Khartoum closed bridges on Friday evening in anticipation of the protests.

"Departing from peacefulness, approaching and infringing on sovereign and strategic sites in central Khartoum is a violation of the laws," SUNA reported, citing a provincial security coordination committee.

"Chaos and abuses will be dealt with," it added.

The demonstrators have demanded that the military has no role in government during a transition to free elections

Protesters in Khartoum chanted: "Close the street! Close the bridge! Burhan will come straight to you," referring to military leader and sovereign council head Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

They were also heard cheering when security forces fired tear gas, a Reuters witness said.

A senior official at one internet provider told Reuters the service disruption followed a decision by the National Telecommunication Corporation, which oversees the sector.

U.N. Special Representative to Sudan Volker Perthes urged Sudanese authorities not to stand in the way of Saturday's planned demonstrations.

"Freedom of expression is a human right. This includes full access to the Internet. According to international conventions, no one should be arrested for intent to protest peacefully," Perthes said.

Pope Francis Calls for Dialogue To Heal a Divided World

ROME (Dispatches) - Pope Francis has used his Christmas message to decry increasing polarisation in personal and international relationships, saying only dialogue can resolve conflicts ranging from family feuds to threats of war.

In his "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) message delivered on Saturday, Christmas Day, the head of the Catholic Church called on individuals and world leaders to talk to each other rather than dig in their heels, a distancing he said has been worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our capacity for social relationships is sorely tried; there is a growing tendency to withdraw, to do it all by ourselves, to stop making an effort to encounter others and do things together," Francis said from the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica in a wet and windy Rome.

"On the international level too, there is the risk of avoiding dialogue, the risk that this complex crisis will lead to taking shortcuts rather than setting out on the longer paths of dialogue. Yet only those paths can lead to the resolution of conflicts and to lasting benefits for all."

Francis, who turned 85 last week, listed conflicts, tensions or crises in Syria, Yemen, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Sudan, South Sudan and elsewhere.

"We continue to witness a great number of conflicts, crises and disagreements," he said, speaking from the same balcony where he first appeared to the world as pope after his election in March 2013.

"These never seem to end, by now we hardly even notice them. We have become so used to them that immense tragedies are now being passed over in silence; we risk not hearing the cry of pain and distress of so many of our brothers and sisters," he said, speaking to an unusually small crowd reduced by COVID-19 restrictions and the weather to only a few thousand.



Berlin, Kremlin Envoys to Meet Over Ukraine

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Senior German and Russian government officials have agreed to a rare in-person meeting next month in an effort to ease political tensions over Ukraine, a German government source said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's foreign policy adviser Jens Plöetner and Russia's Ukraine negotiator Dmitry Kozak agreed to meet after a lengthy phone conversation on Thursday, the source said on condition of anonymity.

The German government has not made any official comment. A spokesman for Kozak declined to comment. There have been a flurry of phone calls between western leaders and Russian President Vladimir Putin in recent months over Russia's military build-up on the Ukrainian border and resulting fears of an invasion.

In-person meetings between senior Western and Russian government officials have been few and far between, though U.S. President Joe Biden held talks with President Putin in Geneva last June.

Since taking office this month, Scholz has emphasised the need for dialogue with Russia over its military build-up on the Ukrainian border while joining western allies in backing sanctions should Moscow invade. Berlin doubts more than Washington whether Russia actually wants to attack Ukraine and is keen to de-escalate tensions, two government sources told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Critics accuse Germany of being beholden to Putin because of its need for Russian gas, attacking construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline between the countries, bypassing Ukraine. Berlin says Nordstream 2 is not political and would be only one of several pipelines transporting Russian gas to Europe.

"The German side's goal remains to achieve a swift reactivation of the Normandy format," the German government source said, referring to multilateral talks between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany. SPD parliamentary leader Rolf

Mutzenich told Reuters the party was not "naive" and knew who it was dealing with, adding that it still believes that engagement could help to de-escalate the Ukraine situation.

More Than a Dozen Killed in Latest Greece Migrant Boat Accident

ATHENS (Dispatches) - At least sixteen people died when a migrant boat sank in the Aegean, Greece's coastguard said early Saturday, just hours after a similar incident claimed another 11 lives.

The latest tragedy -- the third since Wednesday -- came amid high smuggler activity not seen in Greek waters in months.

According to Athens News Agency, the coastguard found 16 bodies late Friday, including those of three women and a baby, and rescued 63 people from a boat that overturned and sank near the island of Paros.

Hours earlier, 11 bodies were recovered from a boat that ran aground on an islet north of the Greek island of Antikythera on Thursday evening.

Ninety people stranded on the islet were rescued, the coastguard said.

On Wednesday, a dinghy carrying migrants capsized off the island of Folegandros, killing at least three people.

Thirteen people were rescued, while dozens remain missing, Greek authorities said.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR said the Folegandros accident was the worst in the Aegean Sea this year.

"This shipwreck is a painful reminder that people continue to embark on perilous voyages in search of safety," said Adriano Silvestri, the UNHCR's assistant representative in Greece.

Earlier Friday, the coastguard had intercepted another boat with 92 men and boys on board after it ran aground on the coast of the Peloponnese peninsula.

Three suspected smugglers who fled the boat on foot were later arrested.

The UNHCR estimates that more than 2,500 people have died or gone missing at sea in their attempt to reach Europe from January through November this year.

Nearly one million people, mainly Syrian refugees, arrived in the European Union in 2015 after crossing to Greek islands close to Turkey.

"These days, the criminal activity of smugglers, who are indifferent to human life, has intensified, stacking dozens of distressed people, without life jackets, on boats that do not even meet the basic safety standards," Giannis Plakiotakis, Maritime Affairs Minister commented late Friday.



Taliban Dissolves Afghanistan Election Commission

KABUL (Dispatches) - The Taliban has dissolved Afghanistan's election commission, a panel that supervised polls during the previous Western-backed administration, says a spokesman for the government.

"There is no need for these commissions to exist and operate," spokesman Bilal Karimi said on Saturday, referring to the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission.

"If we ever feel a need, the Islamic Emirate will revive these commissions." The Taliban swept to power in August as a Western-backed government imploded in the final stages of a chaotic military withdrawal by the United States.

Established in 2006, the IEC was mandated to administer and supervise all types of elections, including presidential, according to the commission's website.

"They have taken this decision in a hurry ... and dissolving the commission would have huge consequences," Aurangzeb, who headed the panel up until the fall of the previous regime, told the AFP news agency.

"If this structure does not exist, I am 100 percent sure that Afghanistan's problems will never be solved as there won't be any elections," said Aurangzeb, who like many Afghans goes by only one name.

Halim Fidai, a senior politician in the previous regime, said the decision to dissolve the electoral commission shows the Taliban "does not believe in democracy".

"They are against all democratic institutions. They get power through bullets and not ballots," said Fidai, who was governor of four provinces over the past 20 years.

Before the Taliban takeover, several electoral commission officials were killed by armed groups.

Karimi said the authorities had also dissolved two government departments this week - the ministry of peace, and the ministry of parliamentary affairs.

The Taliban has already shut down the former administration's ministry of women's affairs and replaced it with the ministry for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice.



Elahieh Apt (\$2300)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Zaferanieh Apt (\$3000)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, balcony

Farmanieh Apt (\$2000) F.F
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J, pkg

Darrous bldg (\$10000)
4storey, 20bdrs
enough pkg lots

Jordan Apts (\$1200) 2bdrs, F.F (\$1800) 3bdrs, F.F

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

Jordan Villa (\$3000)
1000sq.m, 5bdrs, yard
S/p, S, J, pkg lots, F.F

IRAN NEWS ADVERTISING
44253401

Don't Waste Your Time

Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties

www.DeltaHOME.ir
The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners

HOME
Real Estate
Member of **DELTA** Real Estate Group
(021) 88888865

IRAN NEWS
PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS
ADVERTISING

TEL: 44253448-50
FAX: 44253234
ADIRANNEWS@GMAIL.COM

Canada to Resume Potato Exports to U.S.

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada has completed an important step for eventually resuming exports of fresh potatoes to the United States from the province of Prince Edward Island, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency said.

Canada unilaterally halted the shipments in November from the province after finding the potato wart fungus on two farms in October, the first in 21 years.

The United States had said it would ban all imports of fresh potatoes from the province unless Canada took further action, a measure Ottawa says would be hard to overturn.



More Than Two-Thirds of World Population Feeling the Brunt of Inflation

LONDON (Dispatches) - Ipsos surveyed over 20,000 people in 30 countries and found that at least half also reported increases in the cost of clothing and shoes, housing, healthcare and entertainment. Two-fifths of respondents expected prices to continue rising for at least the next three months.

Around the world, seven out of 10 people in the Ipsos survey said they had experienced rising prices for vehicle fuel, car payments, maintenance, parking and public transport, as well as groceries, meals and restaurants. Transportation was the area with the largest percentage increase in people seeing significantly higher prices.

Two-thirds said they had seen their utility costs go up - including electricity, gas, water, phone and internet charges. While 55% said clothing and shoes were more expensive, 51% reported higher housing, medical and healthcare pricing and 49% said entertainment had become more costly.

Inflation is toughest on the poorest people in society, the US Congress Joint Economic Committee confirmed in a November 2021 report. The lowest-earning 20% of US households spend 4.5 times more of their income on housing and food and 3.5 times more on transportation than those in the top 20%, it said.

The nation with the greatest number of people worried about rising inflation was Argentina where the official annual inflation rate hit 52.5% in October 2021, according to Reuters.

Perceived cost increase for average of seven categories by country. Most people around the world feel the cost of essential products and services has increased.

The nations where fewest people reported rising prices were Japan, where consumer price inflation was 0.1% in October, and China, where the same month's figure was 1.5%.

Expected increase in household spending.

In the last six months, over a third of people reported much higher utility bills. Fears about continuing price rises were strongest among women and under-35s, according to Ipsos, with upper-income groups expressing the most concern.

Data from international organizations bears out many of the perceptions revealed in the survey. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization says global food prices rose by 27.3% in the 12 months to November 2021.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development says inflation in its 38 member states will reach 5.21% at the end of 2021 and, in the US, inflation hit a 30-year high of 6.2% in November 2021.

But what about the year ahead? The International Monetary Fund says it expects global inflation to fall back in 2022 once the effects of steep rises in sectors like energy have worked through the figures.

However, contributors to the World Economic Forum's Chief Economists' Outlook in November 2021 disagreed about whether inflation would prove temporary or become a major headache for the global economy in 2022.

But they added a warning that in lower- and middle-income countries with less stable central banks, price pressures had been building more quickly throughout 2021 and were "at a greater risk of getting out of hand".

Turkish Lira Caps Historic Week With Big Lift

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's lira closed out its strongest week on record, spiking more than 50% with the support of billions of dollars of state-backed market interventions and a promise that the government would cover FX losses on certain deposits.

Turks did not sell dollars on Monday and Tuesday, according to official data that suggested they had played little role in the sharpest market gains. The state interventions, meanwhile, cost the central bank more than \$8 billion this week, according to traders' calculations.

The currency gained for five straight days and touched mid-November levels; it stood at 10.7 versus the dollar on Friday. The lira had plunged on Monday to an all-time low of 18.4 per dollar, after a months-long slide due to unorthodox interest rate cuts and fears of an inflationary spiral.

But late on Monday President Tayyip Erdogan unveiled a scheme in which the Treasury and central bank would reimburse losses on converted lira deposits against foreign currencies, sparking the currency's biggest intraday rally ever.

In an interview with broadcaster A Haber, Erdogan said Turks showed confidence in the local currency and lira deposits increased by 23.8 billion lira after the anti-dollarisation plan announcement.

But data from the BDDK banking watchdog showed that, after heavy accumulation of dollars last week, Turkish individual depositors held \$163.7 billion of hard currencies on Tuesday - virtually unchanged from Monday and Friday, when the total was \$163.8 billion.

Instead, the lira got a big boost from what traders and economists called backdoor dollar sales by state banks, supported by the central bank.

In the first three days of this week alone, the central bank's net foreign reserves dropped by \$8.5 billion, according to the calculations of three bankers who spoke to Reuters. The drop totalled nearly \$18 billion in December, they said.

"We suspect positioning and stealth intervention will continue to dominate the price action," said Win Thin, global head of currency strategy at Brown Brothers Harriman. "Even if the lira stabilizes, there are still strong inflationary impulses in the economy that will continue to erode the value of any local currency holdings."

After Reuters reported progress in talks over possible currency swap lines with Azerbaijan and the United Arab Emirates, Turkey's central bank governor, Sahap Kavcioglu, said the bank could sign two currency swap deals within two weeks.

Citing four sources familiar with the operations, including a senior Turkish official, Reuters reported on Thursday that state banks heavily sold dollars earlier this week on the heels of Erdogan's announcement.

The state banks have not commented on the issue.

The central bank, which was not immediately available for comment, had announced dollar-selling market interventions earlier this month but not this week.

IMF Extends Emergency Funding by 18 Months

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said yesterday it will extend its flexible access to emergency funding for an additional 18 months to help nations severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The IMF's executive board agreed to "temporary increases to the cumulative access limits under its emergency financing instruments" through June 2023, the Washington-based crisis lender said in a statement.

In April 2020, as the world faced the first wave of coronavirus infections and deaths, the IMF eased access to such aid, including raising the level of funding that countries could obtain.

The programs have already been extended twice, in September 2020 and again last March.

The board also agreed that "all other access limits" which had been temporarily increased will be reduced to their pre-pandemic levels beginning January 1, 2022 as scheduled.

"This decision reflects the expected and ongoing gradual shift to upper-credit-tranche quality arrangements from emergency financing triggered by urgent, pandemic-related balance of payment needs," the IMF said.

It also stressed that the decision ensures "continued access" by member countries to the IMF's emergency financing should urgent balance of payment issues arise.

The tools include the Rapid Credit Facility, an interest-free program available to low-income nations, and the Rapid Financing Instrument, which is available to all Fund members.

The grants can be disbursed very quickly, to help member states implement policies to address emergencies.

On Monday the IMF said it had approved the fifth and final round of debt relief under a program meant to help the world's poorest nations weather Covid.

Iraq Pays Final Kuwait War Reparations

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq has paid its last war reparations to Kuwait more than 30 years since the invasion of the Persian Gulf country by former autocrat Saddam Hussein, officials said.

On Aug. 2, 1990, Hussein ordered his army to invade Kuwait and seize what he described as "Iraq's 19th province," before being pushed back seven months later by a U.S.-led coalition.

"Iraq has closed the file of the Kuwait war reparations, having paid the last of its dues," Mozher Saleh, the prime minister's economic adviser, was quoted as saying by the official Iraqi News Agency.

In total, Iraq has paid \$52.4 billion in reparations, he said. "This is not a small amount," he added. "The sum would have been enough to construct an electricity network that

would have served Iraq for many years."

Despite being rich in hydrocarbons, Iraq's electricity infrastructure has suffered from years of negligence and successive wars, facing regular power cuts.

Saleh said he hoped that the slice of budget previously allocated for reparations would now be directed to development projects.

The central bank announced on Tuesday the payment of the final portion of the reparations, valued at \$44 million.

The payments were suspended in 2014 when Daesh took over large swathes of Iraq but were resumed in 2018, following the group's defeat.

Funds for the reparations come from a 5 percent tax levied on sales of Iraq's petroleum and petroleum products.

Japan, Taiwan Agree to Bolster Cooperation in Field of Economic Security



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan and Taiwan on Friday agreed to bolster cooperation in the field of economic security with an emphasis on supply chain resiliency for semiconductors and other crucial goods, local media reported.

During the virtual talks attended by members of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, the Taiwanese side showed strong interest in a planned bill to promote economic security which Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government aims to submit to parliament next year, Kyodo News reported.

According to the Japanese publication, the meeting was held as the LDP has stepped up exchanges with the Taiwanese ruling party, the self-ruled island facing military pressure from an increasingly assertive China.

"We must make it effective legislation," Kyodo News quoted Akimasa Ishikawa, head of the LDP's Economy, Trade and Industry Division.

In the meeting, the LDP welcomed Taipei's bid to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement between 11 Pacific Rim countries, which China has also applied to join, said Masahisa Sato, chief of the LDP Foreign Affairs Division.

Earlier, Japan, a member of the TPP, said it welcomes Taiwan's application to take part in the trade deal and it sees no technical problem with it, while Beijing has expressed strong opposition to Taipei's move and has lodged a protest to it, Kyodo News reported.

Beijing claims full sovereignty over Taiwan, a democracy of almost 24 million people located off the southeastern coast of mainland China, despite the fact that the two sides have been governed separately for more than seven decades.

2021 Global Venture Capital Investment on Pace for Record High

LONDON (Dispatches) - Global venture capital investment is on course to double this year from 2020 to a record high of more than \$580 billion, driven by investor interest in online services in the health care, financial and retail sectors spurred by monetary easing in major economies, according to data from a U.S. research firm.

Venture companies raised a total of \$437.7 billion worldwide in the first nine months of 2021, marking five straight quarters of growth, data from CB Insights show.

The same pace of investment in startups into the fourth quarter would bring the annual figure to \$583.6 billion, far exceeding the \$284.2 billion last year. Investors are paying close attention to digitalization and seeking to capitalize on monetary easing amid the coronavirus pandemic.

During the first three quarters, the health care, financial technology and retail sectors raised \$97.1 billion, \$94.7 billion and \$82.5 billion, respectively, according to the data released in October by CB Insights.

By country, fundraising by venture companies in the United States stood at \$210.4 billion, accounting for nearly half of the global total during the nine-month period, with large investment deals involving data management

firm Databricks Inc., grocery delivery company Gopuff and financial-technology company Chime Financial Inc.

In Asia, \$125.5 billion was raised during the same period, with \$25.5 billion by Chinese startups and \$9.9 billion invested in India.

In Japan, venture companies raised ¥580 billion (\$5.1 billion), up around 60% from a year earlier and surpassing the previous annual record high logged in 2019, according to a Japanese research company.

Among them, biotech venture Spiber Inc., based in Tsuruoka, Yamagata Prefecture, raised ¥34.4 billion from U.S. investment fund Carlyle Group and other investors, according to a Carlyle press release in September.

The Chinese government has been tightening its control of domestic information-technology giants such as Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. to rein in their economic clout, and some global investment previously bound for China could be diverted to Japan, according to the Japan Venture Capital Association.

In a time of both misinformation and too much information, quality journalism is more crucial than ever.



Bairami Wins Gold at Turkey's Downhill Skiing Tourney

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian athlete Samaneh Bairami won the gold medal of women's classical five-kilometer downhill skiing at Turkey international skiing competitions.

On the first day of the 2021 Turkey international skiing competitions, Bairami managed to gain the gold medal of the competitions at women's classical five-kilometer downhill skiing.

In men's classical ten-kilometer downhill skiing champions, a skier from the host country won the 1st through 3rd rank, while the Iranian team's Sattar Seyd and Daniel Saveh-Shemshaki ranked 8th and 9th respectively.

The downhill international competitions are being held with the participation of skiers from 14 countries.



James Webb Space Telescope, World's Largest, Lifts Off Into Orbit

PARIS (Dispatches) - The world's largest and most powerful space telescope has rocketed away on a high-stakes quest to behold light from the first stars and galaxies and scour the universe for hints of life.

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope soared from French Guiana on South America's northeastern coast, riding a European Ariane rocket into the morning sky on Saturday.

The \$9b observatory hurtled towards its destination 1.6 million kilometres (1 million miles) away – or more than four times beyond the moon. It will take a month to get there and another five months before its infrared eyes are ready to start scanning the cosmos.

First, the telescope's enormous mirror and sunshield need to unfurl; they were folded origami-style to fit into the rocket's nose cone. Otherwise, the observatory will not be able to peer back in time 13.7 billion years as anticipated, within a mere 100 million years of the universe-forming Big Bang.

"It's going to give us a better understanding of our universe and our place in it: who we are, what we are, the search that's eternal," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said earlier this week.

But he cautioned: "When you want a big reward, you have to usually take a big risk."

Reporting from Kourou, French Guiana, Al Jazeera's Manuel Rapalo said the historic mission which has "revolutionised astronomy" is "going to allow scientists to peer back in time to the early stages of our universe"

"Scientists are also going to be able to examine the atmospheres of planets and determine whether or not planets could not only be habitable and suitable for humans to possibly one day colonize, but to determine whether or not those conditions are optimal for life," he said.

Intended as a successor to the ageing Hubble Space Telescope, the long-delayed James Webb is named after NASA's administrator during the 1960s. NASA partnered with the European and Canadian space agencies to build and launch the new 7-tonne telescope, with thousands of people from 29 countries working on it since the 1990s.

Around the world, astronomers had eagerly waited to see Webb finally taking flight after years of setbacks. Last-minute technical snags bumped the launch nearly a week, then gusty wind pushed it to Christmas.

"We launch for humanity this morning," Arianespace CEO Stephane Israel said minutes before liftoff. "After Webb, we will never see the skies in quite the same way."



Klaus Pontipiddan, one of the scientists involved in the Webb Project, told Al Jazeera from Baltimore, US that it was "a beautiful launch".

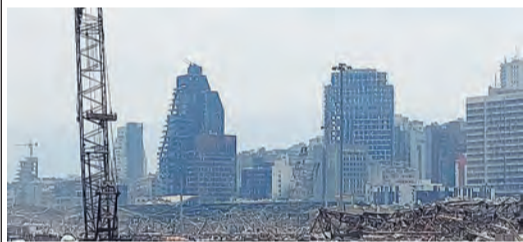
"It was just beautiful to see everything went off without a hitch," he said. "We hope that we can now see the first galaxies formed in the universe almost 13-and-a-half billion years ago."

The telescope's showpiece: a gold-plated mirror more than 6.5 meters (21 feet) across. Protecting the observatory is a wispy, five-layered sunshield, vital for keeping the light-gathering mirror and heat-sensing infrared detectors at subzero temperatures. At 21 by 14 metres (70 by 46 feet), it is the size of a tennis court.

If all goes well, the sunshield will be opened three days after liftoff, taking at least five days to unfold and lock into place. Next, the mirror segments should open up like the leaves of a drop-leaf table, 12 days or so into the flight.

In all, hundreds of release mechanisms need to work perfectly in order for the telescope to succeed. "Like nothing we've done before," NASA program director Greg Robinson said.

Lebanon Crises Increase Suffering of Migrant Domestic Workers



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Many migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are denied basic human rights, and suffered abuse at the hands of their employers. Since the worsening economic crisis in the country their plight has, if anything, worsened.

"The recruitment agencies and employers treat us as if we are human commodities!" says Adanesh Worko, an Ethiopian worker who works in a house in Beirut. "Sometimes I am beaten and denied food but, because of my contract, I cannot choose to work somewhere else, or go back home. My employer said 'I bought you. Pay me \$2,000 and then you can leave wherever you want.'"

Around 250,000 domestic workers are believed to be living in Lebanon, and around 99 per cent of them are migrants on work permits. The vast majority are women from Ethiopia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, who are earning salaries ranging from from \$150 to \$400 a month.

The recent economic crisis in Lebanon has left many of them without a job, but those who are in work remain subject to the "kafala" or sponsorship system that has been likened to modern slavery, and puts them at the mercy of their employers.

Under this system, which has been denounced by civil society organizations and human rights associations, a migrant worker cannot terminate their work contract without the consent of their employer. The system gives employers almost complete control over workers' lives, and makes them vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and abuse. And, if they escape, their stay in the country becomes illegal.

The workers' most basic human rights – such as the right to work specific hours; the right to keep personal documents such as a passport or residence card; and the right to rest, move freely, communicate with friends and family, and enjoy other personal freedoms – are not respected, according to human rights sources.

"Kafa", a Lebanese association supported by UN Women, provides services to migrant women workers who are subjected to sexual and physical violence by their sponsors. The organization focuses on protecting domestic female workers, especially those who are exposed to violence, by providing them a shelter, and a range of legal, social, health and psychological services.

The Association believes that many of the suicides cases among migrant domestic workers are linked to ill-treatment and the lack of the most basic rights. Other reasons, according to Kafa, include a lack of legal protection, because they are not considered workers under Lebanon's labor laws.

Namibia Eyeing Emerging Market for Green Hydrogen

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Namibia is one of many countries seeking to cash in on the green energy rush and it is positioning itself as a leader in the emerging market for green hydrogen, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Many experts agree that "green" hydrogen, a carbon-friendly nontoxic gas produced using renewable energy, can play a significant role in achieving a green gas-neutral economy by 2050, helping to combat global warming.

The southwest African nation is already "putting up to €40 million (\$45.3 million) from Germany to use on feasibility studies and pilot projects related to so-called green hydrogen."

"Germany's government says Namibia's natural advantages could help it produce the world's cheapest green hydrogen — a crucial ingredient in policies hoping to cut carbon emissions to the net-zero benchmark by 2050," the WSJ reported.

"The list is quite short of those new potential large renewable capable countries and Namibia is there," the reported quoted Noel Tomnay, global head of hydrogen consulting at Wood Mackenzie, as saying. But he also



pointed to significant challenges. "Infrastructure, suitable water and just the uncertainty associated with someone who's not been doing that in the past on a large scale," he said.

According to the report, several global players expressed interest after Namibia's government put out a request for proposals to develop two separate but

adjacent sites, where it envisions massive desalination plants. The sites would also include wind and solar farms as well as electrolyzers — systems that use electricity to split water into hydrogen and oxygen—which would be used to produce green hydrogen and ammonia for export.

Namibia received nine bids from six developers for the two sites, including South Africa's Sasol Ltd., Australia's Fortescue Metals Group Ltd. and Germany's Enertrag AG—a shareholder in Hyphen Hydrogen Energy (Pty) Ltd., which has been awarded both sites.

In the global race for green hydrogen, Namibia is the latest sub-Saharan African country with major natural assets to position itself as a potential green energy hub.

China Mulls Bill to Tackle Workplace Discrimination Against Women

BEIJING (AFP) - Chinese lawmakers are discussing new rules to prevent workplace discrimination and sexual harassment against women amid a string of high-profile cases in recent months.

A draft bill published Friday includes a ban on employers stating gender preferences on job ads and quizzing female applicants about their marital or pregnancy status — a common practice that has been criticized for decades.

Rapid economic growth in the past four decades coupled with the one-child rule has opened up more educational and employment opportunities for Chinese women.

But women's participation in the workforce has dropped, due to gender-based filtering when hiring and as more women care for families amid a severe shortage of affordable childcare options. A report by Human Rights Watch in June found that one in five civil service job postings in 2019 specified a preference for male applicants.

The report also says that it was a common practice for employers including schools to force female staff to sign contracts promising not to get pregnant for several years as a pre-condition for being hired. The proposed new rules come amid concerns that China's new three-child rule could make employers even more reluctant to hire women and as officials crack down on the local #MeToo movement after a string of cases that led to a public outcry over sexual assault in the workplace.

Earlier this month, e-commerce giant Alibaba group fired a female staffer who had accused a manager of sexual assault. The proposed amendments will make enforcement easier by clearly defining what sexual harassment is, state-run Xinhua news agency said. According to a draft text published Friday, it prohibits "vulgar speech", "inappropriate physical behavior" or "the display or dissemination of sexual images, information, text, audio or video". It also requires employers to set up mechanisms to prevent, investigate and respond to such complaints "without delay", but there were no details on any penalties for failing to do so. The amendments are open for public comment until January 22, 2022.

One World and...

FROM PAGE 1

According to a human rights report, 91% of children in the Gaza Strip suffer from some form of psychological trauma after Israel's latest war on Gaza.

Israel's brutal siege on the Gaza Strip since 2007 has inflicted severe hardship on residents. The poverty rate among Gaza's population has reached 53 percent, while "extreme poverty" stands at 33.8 percent, according to statistics by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

About 68 percent of families do not have enough to eat, while 80 percent of Gazans are dependent on aid, and the area's unemployment rate stands at 45.1 percent, according to PCBS.

Despite several anti-Israeli votes in the UN and international bodies, this fake country has always escaped any serious punishment from the international bodies and it seems this time also the result of such voting will be in vain because as usual the U.S. and its Western allies will come to the rescue of Zionists and will help this killer regime to survive any international punishment.

To punish the Zionist regime and to stop it from committing more crimes, the world should stand united in confronting this stubborn and criminal regime and to this end, they should first tame the supporters of this criminal regime and as long as the veto right exists, one cannot expect any punishment for the Zionists.

This passive attitude of the UN has emboldened Israel to continue its crimes and state terrorism and even they are rude enough to threaten other countries with attacks. A unity and consolidation among Muslims can be a solution for taming this savage regime and Muslim states, and first they should boycott Israeli products and services and cut any relation with this regime otherwise this regime will ride its horse in the region and in the world and such resolutions and useless probes are unable to stop this fake regime whose existence is ticking down.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the only Muslim country which has announced its stance firmly against this cancerous regime and it will continue its policy until the moment Palestinians get their rights and lands back and all efforts of the West for saving this regime are in vain and resorting to pretexts to save Israel are useless.



Paris Accused of...

FROM PAGE 1

On Thursday, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian criticized "non-constructive" stances taken by some European signatories to the 2015 deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), during the previous round of the Vienna talks.

Following a year of strategic patience, Iran decided to let go of some of the restrictions on its nuclear energy program, resorting to its legal rights under the JCPOA, which grants a party the right to suspend its contractual commitments in case of a non-performance by the other side.

The seventh round of the talks, the first under Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi's administration, started on November 29 following a five-month pause.

During the discussions, which concluded on December 17, Iran presented two draft texts which address, separately, the removal of US bans and Iran's return to its nuclear commitments under the JCPOA.

The eighth round of the talks is expected to resume on December 27.

Industries Called on...

FROM PAGE 1

The data for gas consumption in the steel industry indicates that this industry has a larger share in the country's total gas demand compared to other major industries and natural gas has played an effective role in the development of this industry, according to the official.

Falahatian stated that maintaining and increasing gas production in the country requires more than \$80 billion of investment in the gas industry, so the stability of gas supply to major industries, especially steel, requires the cooperation and participation of these industries.

Of the required \$80 billion, \$23.6 billion is needed for increasing pressure and stabilizing the production of the active gas fields, while \$36.4 billion is required for the development of new fields, \$8 billion is needed for the development and improvement of gas refineries, \$1.2 billion is needed to collect flare gases, and finally, \$3 billion to develop gas storage in fields, \$6 billion for pipelines and stations, and \$2 billion to optimize infrastructure, the official explained.

Int'l Community...

FROM PAGE 1

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, stepped up its criticism of the Israeli regime in the wake of the growing violence by its troops and settlers in the West Bank.

"At a time when the Palestinian people and the whole world celebrate Christmas, the settler militias, their armed terrorist organizations, the occupation forces and their various branches continue to escalate the aggression against the Palestinian people, their land, property, homes and holy sites," its ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement.

Everett Hurt in Crash That Killed Passenger

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Washington Football Team defender Deshaun Everett was hurt and his passenger killed in a single-car crash outside the US capital city, police in Loudon County, Virginia, confirmed.

Everett, a seven-year NFL veteran, was the driver of the car, which investigators said left the road, struck several trees and rolled over on Thursday night. His passenger, identified by authorities as 29-year-old Olivia S. Peters, died of her injuries at a local hospital, where Everett was being treated for "serious but non life-threatening" injuries, the NFL team said.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
ISSN 1024-6053
P.O. Box: 15875-8551
Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzadaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Printed by:Honar Sarzmin Sabz
Distributed by:
Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute
Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Japan Not to Send Gov't Delegation to Beijing Olympics

TOKYO, (Dispatches) - Japan will not send a government delegation to February's Winter Olympics in Beijing, it said, a move likely to deepen tension with China.

The decision follows a U.S.-led diplomatic boycott of the Games over concerns about human rights in China, although Japan has avoided explicitly labelling its move as such. Japan, while a partner of the United States, also has strong economic ties to China. Tokyo will not send a government delegation to the 2022 Winter Games, but will instead send some officials with direct ties to the Olympics, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told a news briefing.

Rangnick Questions Practicality of Two Cup Competitions in England

LONDON (Dispatches) - England's soccer governing bodies must sit down and discuss whether it is feasible to have both the FA Cup and the League Cup in a calendar where teams play too many games, Manchester United interim boss Ralf Rangnick said.

Rangnick added he had no issues with sticking to the tradition of playing over the festive period and looked forward to experiencing it for the first time in his coaching career but wanted to discuss scrapping cup replays and playing in two cups.

"England is the only top league that plays two cup competitions. In France they abolished the second one a year or two ago, we are the only country that plays two cup competitions," Rangnick told reporters.

"I know the League Cup is still kept for the third and fourth division teams, especially to improve the financial situations of those clubs. But I still think, if we speak about a tight calendar, (we are) playing too many games.

"The other issue changed in the last two weeks is in the FA Cup after a draw you have to have a replay. This had been changed now, I think this is a good idea. In other countries, you play extra time and penalties, and never have replays."

FA Cup replays in rounds three and four this season have been scrapped to help clear the fixture backlog after several postponements but four Premier League teams will play two-legged semi-finals in the League Cup next month.

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola had said earlier on Thursday that it was imperative the Premier League switch to five substitutions per game to ease the workload on players and Rangnick echoed the sentiment.



"It was decided every team could substitute five players when COVID started 18 months ago. I think it was the right decision to have more options to change players, to save energy for players, especially if they have only just recovered from COVID," the German coach said.

"The same is true right now, we have a similar situation to as we had one-and-a-half years ago... England is the only country where they don't allow five subs."

United have had two Premier League games called off due to a COVID-19 outbreak in the squad and Rangnick said everyone was finally back and available for Monday's trip to Newcastle United barring injured midfielder Paul Pogba.

United are sixth in the standings with 27 points but have two games in hand on the top four.

He also delivered a special Christmas message to the club's supporters all around the world.

The 63-year-old German has been busy preparing the squad for Monday's Premier League match against Newcastle United, but he has given the players time off today to be with their loved ones.

Djokovic Not to Go to Pre-Australian Open ATP Cup

BELGRADE (AFP) - Novak Djokovic will not play in the ATP Cup ahead of the Australian Open, where his participation is in doubt because he refuses to say if he has been vaccinated against Covid-19, his team have told Serbian newspaper Blic.

"It is 99 percent sure that Novak won't go to the ATP Cup. He is training here (in Belgrade) but he has decided to give that tournament a miss," an unnamed member of his team said.

The ATP Cup in Sydney is a team tournament that traditionally kicks off the men's season.

World number one Djokovic could win a record 21st Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, which starts on January 17, but to enter Australia he and members of his entourage will have to be vaccinated and the 34-year-old has previously expressed his opposition to the vaccine.

His father Srdjan said in late November that Djokovic would probably not play the Australian Open and accused the organisers of "blackmail".

South Korea Targets Two Gold Medals At Beijing Games

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's Olympic Committee (KSOC) has set a target of two gold medals and a top-15 finish at next year's Beijing Winter Games, Yonhap news agency reported.

South Korea won five golds when they hosted the 2018 Games in Pyeongchang and their overall tally of 17 medals, including eight silver and four bronze, was their best at a Winter Olympics.

Three of their five gold medals at Pyeongchang came in short track speed skating but they may be without double Olympic champion Shim Suk-hee, who has been handed a two-month suspension, in Beijing.

The women's curling team, silver medallists in 2018, booked their place at the 2022 Games last weekend.

The Beijing Olympics begin on Feb. 4.

Dravid Urges India To Seize Their Moment In History

PRETORIA (Reuters) - India coach Rahul Dravid has urged his players to seize the chance to claim a first ever test series win in South Africa, a moment that could be career defining for many in the team as they prepare for the first test in Pretoria.

India have enjoyed recent success in Australia and England, but South Africa remains a mighty challenge for the top ranked test side, though they will arguably never have had a better chance against a home team going through a transition period and with far less experience than in the past.

"It is a great challenge and a great opportunity for everyone," Dravid told reporters on Saturday. "It is something you look forward to as a batsman, the chance to play away from home and test yourself against some really good opposition in their home conditions.

"A lot of your career is defined by those sorts of performances, so it is a great opportunity for everyone in the group to put in the performances that are something that they can remember, and people will remember them for."

Raonic Withdraws From Australian Open With Heel Injury



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Canadian Milos Raonic has pulled out of next month's Australian Open as the former world number three continues his recovery from a heel injury, the organizers said on Saturday.

Raonic suffered a thigh injury in March and returned to the tour

after a three-month gap. But his 2021 season was cut short due to another heel issue following his first-round loss at the Atlanta Open in July.

"Milos Raonic has withdrawn from the #AusOpen as he continues his recovery from an Achilles injury," the organizers of the Grand Slam said on Twitter.

Raonic, who turns 31 on Monday, reached a career-high world ranking of third in 2016 - the year he reached the finals at Wimbledon and made a run to the semi-finals at Melbourne Park. The Canadian, who has currently slipped to 70th, is the latest to be ruled out of the Australian Open, with Roger Federer, Stan Wawrinka, Jennifer Brady, Karolina Pliskova, Karolina Muchova, Serena Williams and Bianca Andreescu also ruled out with injuries.

Gerrard Hails Villa Players For Rise



LONDON (Dispatches) - Steven Gerrard said Friday his players deserved the credit for Aston Villa's climb up the Premier League table since he took charge of the Birmingham club.

Advertising
Villa had lost five straight league matches and were just two points above the relegation zone when Gerrard left Scottish champions Rangers to replace Dean Smith, sacked as manager in November.

Since Gerrard's arrival at Villa Park, the club have climbed from 16th to 10th and will be bidding for a fifth win in seven league games when they are at home to Chelsea.

"I had confidence and belief that we could come in and have the impact that we've had," said Gerrard, who brought several of his coaching staff with him from Glasgow giants Rangers.

"The players deserve the credit for going and carrying those performances out."

The former Liverpool and England captain added: "Once I started talking to Villa, the very first thing I did was look at the fixtures in the short-term.

"There were a lot of fixtures to be excited about, and I think the players have done extremely well in terms of the points return."

Under Gerrard, Villa have beaten Brighton, Crystal Palace, Leicester and Norwich while losing narrowly to title contenders Manchester City and Liverpool.

"We were close to taking a point out of the City game as well," Gerrard said.

"The Liverpool game was slightly different -- they dominated for large parts.

"But I think we gave a good account of ourselves and made them extremely nervous in the latter stages of that game. "The players should be confident, they should have loads of belief heading into a really busy schedule."

Conte Has No Qualms Over Kane's Attitude



LONDON (Dispatches) - Antonio Conte has said Harry Kane is "totally involved in the Tottenham project" despite a modest start to the season.

Kane was linked with a pre-season move to Manchester City but the deal fell through.

Many pundits felt his failure to join the Premier League champions has contributed to Kane's poor form in the early stages of the campaign -- although England's agonising penalty shoot-out loss to Italy in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley may have played a part as well.

England captain Kane found goals hard to come by when Nuno Espirito Santo, sacked in November and replaced by Conte, was in charge of Tottenham and even now the striker has scored just nine goals in all competitions this season.

However, he scored a second Premier League goal of the campaign against Liverpool last weekend and the 28-year-old will aim to build on that performance when Spurs are at home to London rivals Crystal Palace.

Even so, Kane's returns have been a long way off last season's 23 goals and 14 assists in the Premier League.

"Harry has showed me great availability and showed me (he is) totally involved in the Tottenham project," Conte said Friday.

"I see him every day and I see that he is happy," the Italian added.

"He leads in the training ground, he leads in the dressing room and he leads during the training sessions in a fantastic way. I am happy for what I am seeing every day."