

**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 129,830 With 119 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh Said That Iran's Negotiating Team Joined Vienna to Make Assure of Lifting of the Sanctions, Adding that Vienna Talks Concentrate on Sanctions Removal**

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## Vienna Talks to Focus On Sanctions Removal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top negotiator to Vienna talks on the removal of anti-Iran sanctions says all participants in the first meeting of the seventh round of talks have agreed that removing sanctions must be the main focus of negotiations.

Ali Baqeri-Kani made the remark while talking to reporters following the end of the first meeting of the nuclear deal's participants in the Austrian capital on Monday.

Baqeri-Kani said he was optimistic after the first meetings in Vienna, adding that all parties agreed that focus of the talks should be lifting of sanctions imposed on Iran after the US unilateral withdrawal from the landmark 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

He added that the participants also agreed that a special working group should start its work on Tuesday to discuss "the removal of illegal and brutal sanctions" imposed on the Iranian nation. "I believe that this is a great achievement that all member states of the P4+1 group accepted Iran's rightful request and emphasized that the state of the US regime's illegal sanctions against our people must be clarified first and then other issues be discussed," Iran's top negotiator said. **See Page 7**

## Gov't Has No Time to Waste to Reboot Economy

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Plan and Budget Organization says the Iranian administration will not wait for the Vienna negotiations to revive the economy which is being geared up for a growth rate of 8%.

"Based on our land use planning and domestic capacities, the goal of achieving an economic growth of 8% is feasible," Masoud Mirkazemi wrote on his twitter page.

The new administration has set economic growth, stagnating around zero in recent years, as a priority. Its main goal, officials have said, is to control inflation and achieve an economic growth rate of 8%.

Mirkazemi sees economic recovery on the way given that the country is emerging from the stagnation under the previous government and the COVID-19 impact.

"We will not keep the country waiting for the negotiations," he said, referring to the talks that resumed in Vienna Monday to revive Iran's 2015 nuclear deal and remove all sanctions imposed on the country under former U.S. president Donald Trump. **See Page 7**

## Tehran Blasts Washington Support For Israel Nuclear Program



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's UN ambassador has denounced Israel's clandestine nuclear program as "real threat" to the Middle East, saying the regime must join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in the first step towards the realization of a region free of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks in a Monday statement to the second session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

In order to remove the obstacles to the establishment of a WMD-free zone, first and foremost, Israel must join all related international legally binding instruments banning weapons of mass destruction, he said.

"Above all, it (Israel) must join the NPT without any precondition while placing all of its nuclear facilities and activities under the comprehensive safeguards of the IAEA," he added, referring to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Takht-Ravanchi also criticized the United States for its unwillingness to engage constructively in the work of the conference and for its continuous support for Israel, including its condoning of the regime's dangerous nuclear weapons program.

"The rejection of the U.S. and Israel to participate in the conference is a major hurdle in its success. Practically, any possible treaty on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East will be meaningless and ineffective unless an entity possessing all types of WMD adheres to it. Therefore, necessary measures should be taken to solve these problems," he stated.

Israel, which pursues a policy of deliberate ambiguity about its nuclear weapons, is estimated to have 200 to 400 nuclear warheads in its arsenal.

The occupying entity has refused to allow inspections of its military nuclear facilities or sign the NPT.

Unlike Israel, Iran is an NPT signatory and has consistently maintained that its nuclear program is exclusively civilian and subject to the most intensive UN supervision on earth.

Tehran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 with six world powers in order to reassure the world of the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

Pointing to the UN nuclear watchdog's reports, Takht-Ravanchi voiced regret that some delegations raised "unwarranted concerns" about Iran's nuclear program.

"It is unfortunate that this August meeting is being misused to distract the attention from the real threat to the region, that is, the Israeli nuclear weapon program," he lamented. **See Page 7**

## ViewPoint Divide and Rule Policy

Divide and rule policy, or divide and conquer, in politics and sociology is gaining and maintaining power by breaking up larger concentrations of power into pieces that individually have less power than the one implementing the strategy and this policy is usually taken by the colonialists and the West, and world arrogance, especially the British, to dominate the nations and countries.

In the past and even now the world arrogance has been using this policy especially in the Muslim states and among the Muslims, and creation of rift is the main tactic of them which is apparently seen among the governments and nations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran since its establishment in 1979 has emphasized unity among the Muslims in combatting their enemy number one, the Zionists, and unfortunately the rulers of some Islamic countries are playing on the court of the world arrogance and they do not let the Muslims be united.

After dividing Sudan into two countries, it seems the world arrogance is working to divide another Muslim state into two countries in order to have the rein of one part of the territory.

On Monday the leader of Yemen's popular Ansarullah resistance movement warned against seditious conspiracies and divisive attempts by enemies in order to establish their control over the Arab country, stressing that the Saudi-led coalition of aggression continues to perpetrate brutal crimes in the western coastal city of Hudaydah.

"Enemies are seeking to dominate Yemeni people through incitement of sedition and division," Abdul-Malik al-Houthi said in a meeting with a delegation of Bayda tribal leaders in the capital Sana'a on Monday evening.

"Meetings and reunions among people from various walks of life are truly indicative of the level of fraternity, cooperation and understanding within the Yemeni nation. The opportunity is ripe to push for promotion of brotherhood, cooperation and social peace in order to restore security and stability in al-Bayda province," he added.

"We want to beef up nationwide peace and resolve lingering disputes... We want the government and the nation to work together in order to provide civil services," the Ansarullah chief pointed out.

Houthi also pointed to the anniversary of the expulsion of colonial British forces from Yemen, stressing that November 30 marks a bright page in the history of the Arab nation. **See Page 7**

## Iran Opens 2nd Industry Expo in Damascus

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's second expert industry exposition opened in Damascus of Syria, in the presence of the Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade of Iran as well as the Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade of Syria.

Reza Fatemi-Amin and Mohammad Samer Al-Khalil attended the opening ceremony of the exposition on Monday and visited the different parts of the Iranian exhibition.

About 165 Iranian companies, both public and private sectors, are taking part in the exhibition that is underway for five days.

Iranian companies have presented their latest achievements in machinery, shipping, water services, electronic services, technical engineering services, handicrafts, and knowledge-based companies.

The first exposition of Iran in Syria after the defeat of the US-backed ISIS terrorist group was held on December 25 to 28, 2018.

Meanwhile in the ceremony the Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister said that Iran is looking for joint investment with Syria to expand exports to other countries and develop economic relations with this country. **See Page 7**

## Pakistan Gov't to Open More Border Trade Points With Iran

QUETTA (Dispatches) - A high-level meeting presided over by Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo has decided to open more border crossing points between Pakistan and Iran so that trade between the two countries does not come to a halt as it is the only source of income for the people of Makran.

The meeting held in Turbat on Monday gave a final shape to the modus operandi for trading oil and edibles with Iran, being the only source of income for the local people of border areas. The officials concerned briefed the meeting participants about the traditional and proposed model of border trade.

The meeting decided to abolish the condition of possession of a token for locals to cross into Iran and bring oil back with them. Instead, it was decided the local administration would register a driver and his helper on the basis of their national identity cards and steps would be taken for making the registration process easy.

However, for security purposes, only locals would be extended the trading facilities. "No mafia would be allowed at any cost to benefit from this facility," official sources told Dawn, adding that the institutions concerned would take effective steps for the purpose. Besides Makran, the people of Washuk, Kharan and Awaran would also benefit from the border trade facility.

Corps Commander of 12 Corps Lt Gen Sarfraz Ali, provincial ministers Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi, Syed Ehsan Shah, Lala Rasheed Baloch, Akbar Askani and Mahjabeen Sheran, Chief Secretary Mathar Niaz Rana, Balochistan Inspector General of Police Mohammad Tahir Rai, the 44 Division GOC, Frontier Corps inspector general, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Asfandyar Kakar, Makran Commissioner Syed Irfan Shah Gharshen and senior naval officials attended the meeting.

The meeting was informed that presently there were 10 crossing points between Pakistan and Iran, including nine land routes and one sea. It was decided to open more border crossing points between the two neighboring countries. **See Page 7**

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# U.S. Must Lift All Sanctions on Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Stating that Vienna talks are about the return of the US to Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said that the United States must lift all sanctions imposed on Iran.

Mohammad Eslami said that the United States must lift all its cruel and oppressive sanctions imposed against Iranian people.

Turning to the Vienna talks, which was resumed on Monday, he said that these talks are about the return of the United States to JCPOA and it must lift all sanctions imposed against the Iranian people in a 'practical and verifiable' manner.

## Iran Ready to Continue Full Cooperation With IAEA

**TEHRAN (IFP)- President Ebrahim Raisi has told his French Counterpart Emmanuel Macron that the Islamic Republic is ready to continue cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.**

"While in Iran, the director general of the Atomic Energy Agency said nothing about any Iranian non-compliance with its obligations, and we are now ready to continue our full cooperation with the IAEA," Raisi said in a phone conversation with Macron on Monday night.

Raisi noted that Iran has always adhered to its commitments to the nuclear issue, and the IAEA has repeatedly reaffirmed Iran's compliance.

During the phone call with Macron, Raisi referred to Iran's adherence to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the fulfillment of its obligations, the U.S. violation of the agreement, and also the Europeans' failure to live up to their commitments.

"Those who violated the treaty should be asked why they did not fulfill their obligations," he noted.



On the resumption of talks between Iran and the P4+1 in Vienna, Raisi said sending a full team to the talks shows Iran's serious will in these talks.

He called on the French president to work with other countries in Vienna to conclude the negotiations and remove anti-Iran sanctions.

The Iranian President stressed that sanctions have failed to stop Iran's progress, and "today the whole world knows who the violators of the JCPOA are and they must return to their obligations."

The French president condemned the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, saying: "We consider the JCPOA our common responsibility and I have always tried to bring all parties back to the framework of the agreement."

"I have also held talks with U.S. president Biden in this regard, and we are determined to continue the talks until they reach a conclusion," Macron added.

## Iran's Diplomacy Active, Dynamic

TEHRAN (IP) - Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori-Jahromi says the Iranian government's diplomacy is not only active and dynamic but also result-oriented.

In his first press conference held on Monday, Bahadori-Jahromi said that during the first three months of the Raisi administration, 20 international documents were signed with other countries, generally in the economic field. "We had more than 100 face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations during this period between the president and the ministers."

"Our diplomacy today is active and balanced, and several new export records were set during the three months," he noted.

Bahadori-Jahromi also pointed to the Afghan crisis and said that among the regional issues, the crisis in Afghanistan was not a simple issue that the government dealt with tactfully, so it hosted the foreign ministers of neighboring countries.

Concerning the coronavirus vaccination, he said: "100 million doses of new vaccine were injected in these three months, which is 40 times more than the vaccine that was injected during the three months before the Raisi administration."

# Tehran Attends Talks With Good Faith

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian foreign minister, in a phone conversation with the United Nations secretary general, reiterated that Tehran has attended the Vienna talks with good faith and is after a good agreement.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian enumerated the characteristics of a good deal, saying the other side must return to full compliance with its obligations under the Iran nuclear deal, JCPOA.

He said in that case, the Islamic Republic of Iran will reverse its remedial measures, but "the key point is that any resulting deal must be effectively verifiable."

Regarding the 6 previous rounds of talks, Amir Abdollahian pointed out, "We will not ignore the negotiations, but as a new administration, we reserve the right to review the disputed issues and discuss them in light of our own considerations".

The top Iranian diplomat went on to refer to the recent constructive and progressing talks between the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi, saying Tehran will continue its technical cooperation with the IAEA.

Antonio Guterres the UN Secretary General also welcomed the start of the new round of talks and threw his full support behind the full revival of the JCPOA.

The UN chief described Iran's demand for verification of the removal of sanctions as reasonable.

He said it is necessary that all sides make efforts to take confidence-building measures and reaffirmed the UN's full support in this regard.

The two sides also raised the issue of Afghanistan. Amir Abdollahian underlined the need for the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan and described the dangerous humanitarian situation on the eve of the cold season as worrisome.

He cited the existence of the refugee crisis, the freezing of the Afghan financial resources, and Daesh's acts of terrorism as crisis factors in Afghanistan.

António Guterres voiced concern over the profound crisis, particularly the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and underlined the necessity of a cash injection into the economy of the country.

He said the UN is making an effort to set up an international monetary fund with the help of the World Bank and several countries with the aim of creating a mechanism for cash injection into the Afghan economy despite the US sanctions. Subscribe

## Int'l Community Hails Iran's Aid to Afghanistan

MMASHHAD (IP) - Austria's Ambassador to Tehran says the international community praises Iran's aid to Afghanistan, including assistance for the transfer of Austrian citizens from Afghanistan.

Meeting with the official in charge of the Khorasan Razavi Trade Chamber's international strategic supervision, Wolf Dietrich Heim said it was for more than 40 years that Iran was hosting Afghan migrants, preparing them with good supports.

The Austrian ambassador expressed hope that the Vienna talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) would go well and the two countries' ties in different areas, especially trade and economic areas, shored up.

## FM Meets Russian Deputy FM For Bilateral Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met and held talks with Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation for Middle East and Africa Mikhail Bogdanov in Tehran to discuss bilateral ties.

During the meeting, Iranian Foreign Minister pointed to the recent summit of leaders of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) held in Ashgabat, capital of Turkmenistan, and expressed his satisfaction with the trend of cooperation at the regional level.

He called the meetings of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi with the leaders of the region 'fruitful and positive'.

While thanking Russia for playing an active and constructive role in the Vienna talks, Amir-Abdollahian stated that Islamic Republic of Iran is participating in the Vienna talks with a serious will to reach a good and effective agreement.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iran's top diplomat evaluated the cooperation between Islamic Republic of Iran and Russian Federation in regional issues as 'effective and useful' and announced readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host Astana Peace Talks and ministers of foreign affairs on Syria.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, in turn, hailed the long-standing friendly and amicable relations between the two countries and said that his country's officials are happy with the bilateral ties with Tehran.

"We are interested in receiving views of Iranian officials regarding regional developments," Bogdanov emphasized.

In this region, Iran and Russia share many areas of cooperation, the Russian diplomat said.

The Russian official further described the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan as a matter of suspicion and concern in the region and also condemned the sanctions against Syria, noting the importance of relations with Syria.

International Charity Foundation of the Waterfall of Emotions Deprivation camp

## Another step to Support People with Disabilities



The International Charity Foundation of Abshar Atefeh, which has been active since 2001, has been working from the very beginning with an expert and research-oriented view on social and cultural issues to provide conditions for serving and helping the deprived in society. This foundation has 830 agencies in the whole country and 160 agencies in Tehran province and also supports 450 thousand Mehrjoos in the whole country. He has more than 11,000 families in Tehran province supported by the deprivation camp. Ms. Fatemeh Choupani, Director of the Deprivation Camp of the International Charity Foundation, Atefeh Waterfall, admitted in an interview: "I congratulate the disabled in advance on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities." On the occasion of the day and week of the disabled, the International Charity Foundation of Atefeh has organized a donation of wheelchairs and a basket of goods for the dear families under the support of this foundation who are disabled. And our dear benefactors in Tehran province have collected the cost of more than 1000 wheelchairs in the province of Tehran from donors. Boyer Ahmad, Ardabil, Ilam, Bushehr, Kerman, Chaharmahal Bakhtiari, South Khorasan, North Khorasan, Khuzestan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Lorestan Alhamdullah has been prepared. The rial value of each of these devices is twenty-three million rials equal to two million And it is three hundred thousand tomans, and in addition to donating this wheelchair, we have also included the donation of a basket of baskets for these loved ones in our work plan, which was held on the 9th of Azar with the help of God in the form of an empathy exercise. While thanking the benefactors and benefactors of Tehran province and all over the country, who in all moments and all their programs, whether it is dowry, wheelchair donation for the disabled, etc., always thanked being with these loved ones and wished them good health and good prayers. We ask God for the sake of the virtuous.

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National Bank Number:

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Website: [www.absharatefeh.org](http://www.absharatefeh.org)

Instagram : [abshaar\\_atefeh](https://www.instagram.com/abshaar_atefeh)

Telegram : [t.me/bitolreza](https://t.me/bitolreza)

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## Iran-EU 9-Month Trade Up 2% yr/yr

TEHRAN (MNA)- The value of trade between Iran and the European Union reached €3.4 billion during the first nine months of 2021, a two-percent growth compared to the same period last year.

According to the data released by the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Iran exported €554 million worth of commodities to the union during the said nine months, while importing goods valued at €2.7 billion, Mehr News Agency reported.

The trade between Iran and the European Union during the first nine months of 2020 stood at €3.345 billion, the TCCIMA data showed.

Based on the mentioned data, the exports from Iran to Europe in the said nine months increased by 14 percent, while the imports have dropped 0.6 percent year on year.

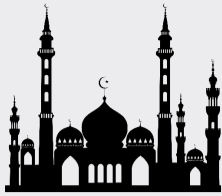
Iran had exported €563 million worth of commodities to the European Union states in the nine-month period from January to September 2020, registering a 13-percent rise compared to the same period in 2019.

Meanwhile, Iranian exports to the union in September declined 23 percent as compared to the figure for the previous months, the data showed.

Foodstuff and livestock, beverages and tobacco, raw materials, mineral fuels, and vegetable oils have been the main commodities Iran exported to the European countries during the said time span, while foodstuff, beverages and tobacco, mineral fuels, vegetable oils, and chemicals also accounted for the largest share of imports.

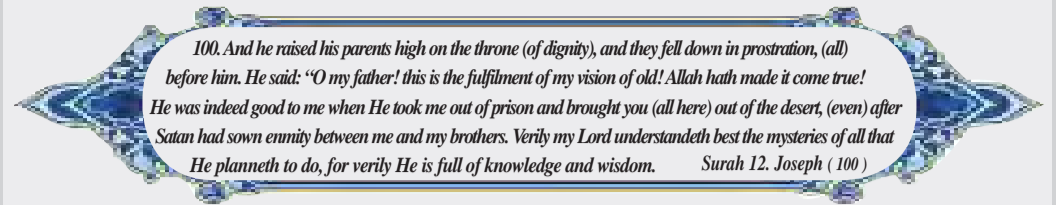
Germany, Italy, and Spain have been the main export destinations for Iranian goods, while Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands were the top exporters to Iran among European nations.

The Islamic Republic had also imported €2.783 billion worth of goods in the first nine months of 2020, a 15-percent decline compared to the corresponding period in 2019.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:53
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:27
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:56



100. And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity), and they fell down in prostration, (all) before him. He said: "O my father! this is the fulfilment of my vision of old! Allah hath made it come true! He was indeed good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert, (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers. Verily my Lord understandeth best the mysteries of all that He planneth to do, for verily He is full of knowledge and wisdom. Surah 12. Joseph (100)

## Iran, China to Launch Joint Free Zones

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Secretary of the Free Zones High Council Mr. Saeed Mohammad says Iran and China can launch the joint free zone under the Shanghai Cooperation Summit (SCO) treaty and Iran can also launch a joint zone with Eurasia under the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) treaty.**

Speaking at the opening of the 13th Exhibition of Investment Opportunities and the 8th International Exhibition of the Stock Exchange, Banking, Insurance, and Privatization called "KISHINVEST 2021" on Kish Island on Monday evening, Mohammad said that investors are the crusaders of the economic war and people and the country need the endeavors of economic activists more than ever.

He added that activists in the fields of bank, insurance and stock market should strengthen the resistance of the country in the hard times of sanctions regardless of the interests of the islands and by focusing on national interests in order to improve the livelihood of the people.

Mohammad went on to say that although sanctions are tough and annoying, some part of the problems is because of incorrect performance and self-interest approach in some parts of the economy either in the private or government sectors, adding that all should work to improve the economic indexes in favor of the public and to increase it.

He noted that the number of the free zones will increase to 15 from 8 and they have different projects, noting that with including 32 special economic zones, 45 percent of the exports of the country are carried out from these areas and free zones account for 2 percent of the exports.

Mohammad went on to say that so far 150 investment opportunities in the free zones have been presented and the information and data will be updated daily and special facilities will be provided to the investors.

Touching upon the establishment of offshore bank in the free zones, he said the issue has been recently discussed in the Supreme National Security Council, adding that the launch of international bourse in the free zones is another issue which is pursued for years but head of Securities and Exchange Organization is determined



the international bourse to be launched in the Kish Free zone.

Mohammad went on to say that today there is a strong diplomacy with 16 neighboring states and Iran can have joint free zone with China under the framework of the SCO treaty and the country can also have joint free zone with Eurasia based on the EAEU treaty.

Meanwhile on the sidelines of the exhibition, Mohammad talked about the ban on imports of South Korean home appliances to the free trade zones and said since all countries use economic tools for political issues, when South Korea blocked Iran assets it is Iran's turn to have reciprocal action and here is the place that Iran can take reciprocal action against Korea.

He hailed the Supreme Leader's prudence on banning the imports of the Korean products while Koreans have blocked Iran's assets at the time the country needs its forex, reiterating that the leader's order should be carried out properly.

He also said that by the launch of the offshore bank in the zones, the forex of Iranian expatriates or resources of the foreign investors can enter the bank, reiterating that any investor can launch the bank in Iran and in its free zones.

## Gov't Eyes 1.2m bpd of Oil Sales in Next Budget

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran would count on 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil sales as a minimum target in a budget planned for next calendar year starting late March, according to sources close to the government and the parliament in the country.

The ILNA news agency cited the sources as saying in a Monday report that a draft budget planned to be submitted to the Iranian parliament on December 6 would contain a target of at least \$30 billion in annual oil export revenues for the Iranian government.

The report said the government would be able to issue extra debts if it failed to meet the oil sale target.

Iran's oil exports started to increase in the second half of 2020 just a year after sales dropped to historic lows because of US sanctions.

A report published by Reuters news agency earlier this month showed that Iranian oil exports to China have averaged 0.5 million bpd over the summer.

Iran's semi-official Fars news agency said in a report on Monday that crude exports from the country have more than tripled to nearly 1 million bpd since a new administration came to office in Tehran in early August.

Analysts believe that Iranian oil exports could reach 2 million bpd next year if the country and world powers can agree to revive a 2015 nuclear deal as part of negotiations that started in Vienna on Monday.

Iranian Oil Ministry officials have promised to bring oil output in the country to nearly 4 million bpd by the end of the current calendar year in late March.

## Iran Carpet Annual Sales Drop to \$72m

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has lost hundreds of millions in annual revenues from exports of hand-woven carpets as a major businessman blame the huge loss on current exchange regulations and US sanctions.

The ILNA news agency said in a Monday report that carpet exports from Iran in the calendar year to late March had topped to \$72.4 million, accounting for 0.17% of the country's total non-oil exports over the period.

That comes as hand-woven carpet shipments used to be a main export earner for Iran besides crude and oil products in the not too distant past.

Government data shows that annual carpet exports had reached a record of nearly \$700 million in 1997. That amounted to about a fifth of the total non-oil exports from the country over that year.

"A main reason for the freefall in carpet exports is the fact that experienced exporters have withdrawn from the market," said Seyyed Razi Miri, a major carpet trader, who insisted that current rules on exports have deterred many traders from export activity.

Iran imposed tight controls on currency liquidity in 2018 after the country's foreign exchange resources came under strain because of US sanctions.

Those controls require exporters to return their hard currency proceeds to the country within a short period of time. Miri said the requirement is totally untenable for carpet traders as they need time to sell their products in foreign countries where demand for hand-woven carpet has declined in recent years.

"Rules and regulations imposed on exports can somehow be viewed as a domestic form of sanction or at least they can have impacts similar to the sanction," he said.

## Head of PR of Khuzestan Steel Company Honored



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - On the occasion of the Basij Week, Head of the Foundation for Preserving the Works and Propagating the Values of the Holy Defense of Khuzestan Province Brigadier Abdolreza Morad Hajati attended the public relations office of Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) and by awarding a plaque of appreciation honored the efforts of the head of the public relations of the company Mr. Gholamreza Forooghinia.

The meeting took place on November 27 at the office of the public relations of the company and during the meeting Brigadier Hajati awarded Mr. Forooghinia with the plaque of honor due to his efforts during the Sacred Defense era and constant cooperation of the company with the foundation.

Hajati said that today there is a heavy duty on the shoulders of them and it is to keep alive the memories of the martyrs and war veterans and to continue their path. He then hailed the CEO of the company Eng. Ebrahimi and also Mr. Forooghinia.

He added that KSC along with sustainable production is a leading organization in observing social responsibilities.

Then the participants in the meeting paid homage to the martyrs by attending the tomb of unknown martyrs of Khuzestan Steel Company.

## PGSOC Involved in Construction of Housing Units for Quake-Hit Areas in Hormozgan



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) has contributed in construction of 10 housing units in the quake-hit areas in Hormozgan Province apart from its logistic and aid services in the areas.

The manager of public relations of Persian Gulf Star Company Ms. Narges Sedaqat announced the news that the company apart from offering aid services and supports in the quake-hit areas has started construction of 10 housing units at the Western Gishan village in the province.

Sedaqat added that 3 development executive groups of the company are currently busy for immediate construction of the housing units in order to end the woes and plights for the residents of these areas and prepare the condition for their return to their normal lives.

She added that the operation for removal of debris in the Western Gishan has ended in less than a week and it is nearing its end in the Zarto village. She added that eight teams of elite construction engineers of the company are present in the scene to accelerate the operation and they are advancing the project based on the needs of the villages.

Sedaqat went on to say that so far the company apart from the project for construction of the housing units, has dispatched logistic and aid services to those regions like dispatching different types of light and heavy road-building machineries as well as water supply tankers.

She concluded that the company in line with its main task of providing fuel for the country observes its social responsibilities and it has been pioneer in serving the public.



Advisor to the President and Secretary of the High Council of Free Zones:

## Goharzamin's Actions in Production and Investment are Significant

According to the report of Public Relations and International Affairs of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company, Dr. Saeed Mohammad, Advisor to the President and Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade, Industrial and Special Economic Zones, visited the Goharzamin booth at the 13th Exhibition of Investment Opportunities and the 8th International Exhibition of Stock Exchange, Bank, Kish Insurance and Privatization stated: Goharzamin Company has taken appropriate measures in the discussion of production and investment and is significant. In fact, this volume of activity has created good employment. Referring to the capabilities and capabilities of Goharzamin Company, he suggested that the company invest in free zones.



## Chad Gives Amnesty to Hundreds of Rebels, Dissidents

N'DJAMENA (Dispatches) - Chad's military-led government on Monday decreed an amnesty for nearly 300 rebels and political dissidents, meeting a key demand by opposition groups invited to join a forum on the troubled country's future.

The amnesty will apply to 296 individuals sentenced for offences including "crimes of opinion", "terrorism" and "harming the integrity of the state," according to a ruling by the Council of Ministers received by AFP.

Rebel groups have said the amnesty is a pre-condition to joining a round table proposed by President Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, 37, who took the reins after his father Idriss Deby Itno was killed fighting insurgents in April.



## Georgia's Ex-President Denies Court Charges

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Supporters of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili scuffled with police and 15 were arrested, the interior ministry said, as he appeared in court to dispute charges of abusing his office.

Ten days after ending a hunger strike, the 53-year-old delivered a defiant speech lasting more than an hour in which he rejected the accusations against him.

Saakashvili was arrested on Oct. 1 after returning from exile to rally the opposition on the eve of local elections. He faces six years in prison after being convicted in absentia in 2018 of abusing his office, charges he rejects as politically motivated.



## Sweden Appoints Andersson as PM



STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Swedish Social Democratic Party leader Magdalena Andersson gets a second chance at becoming the country's prime minister, after her initial attempt last week lasted just seven hours.

Parliament is expected to appoint Andersson as the head of a minority government made up solely of the Social Democrats, with just 10 months to go before September general elections.

The parliament's vote is scheduled to begin at 1:00 pm.

If confirmed as anticipated, Andersson, the 54-year-old current finance minister, faces a challenging period in the run-up to the election. Holding 100 of 349 seats in parliament, her minority government will have to govern with the opposition's budget following what media dubbed a "nightmarish" day in parliament last week.

Last Wednesday, lawmakers elected Andersson as the country's first woman prime minister but she resigned just hours later — before she even had a chance to formally take office — after the Green Party quit her coalition government.

Despite being a nation that has long championed gender equality, Sweden has never before had a woman as prime minister.

The parliamentary turbulence was unprecedented in politically stable Sweden, where the Social Democrats have dominated for almost a century.

The tumult began when Andersson secured a last-minute deal with the Left Party to raise pensions in exchange for its crucial backing to get her elected as prime minister. But that agreement did not sit well with the small Centre Party, which withdrew its support for Andersson's budget due to the concessions made to the Left. That left Andersson's budget with insufficient votes to pass in parliament. Lawmakers instead adopted an alternative budget presented by the opposition conservative Moderates, Christian Democrats and far-right Sweden Democrats.

Andersson grudgingly said she would still be able to govern with that budget, but the Green Party said it could not accept a budget drafted by the far-right and quit the government. That meant Andersson had to resign, as the basis on which she was appointed no longer existed.

## Ethiopia Denies Attack on Sudan

ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - Ethiopia has denied it staged an attack over the weekend along its shared border with Sudan, blaming unrest in the disputed zone on rebels from its war-hit Tigray region.

On Saturday Sudan's military said "several" soldiers had been killed in an attack by armed groups and militias linked to the Ethiopian military in the fertile expanse known as Al-Fashaqa.

The area has long been a source of tension between Addis Ababa and Khartoum, sparking deadly clashes over the last year.

## Castro Vows to Pull Honduras out of the Abyss

TEGUCIGALPA (Dispatches) - Honduras' leftist politician Xiomara Castro, who is on track to be the first female president of the Central American nation, doesn't shy away from making history.

In 2009, she catapulted herself to the helm of a protest movement after her husband, former president Manuel Zelaya, was ousted by a military coup, which pitched Honduras into crisis. The Liberty and Refoundation (Libre) party emerged out of this movement, and after Sunday's elections it was slated to break a century-long run of governments formed from one of two parties.

Castro, 62, looked set for a landslide victory that would bring an end to 12 years of conservative National Party rule marred by corruption, allegations of the president's links to drug trafficking, and an exodus of migrants.

The second of five children in a middle-class family, Castro was born in 1959 in Tegucigalpa. She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and later moved northeast of the capital where she raised four children with Zelaya. Promoting "democratic socialism," Castro wants to decriminalize abortion, reduce bank charges for remittances, create a U.N.-backed anti-corruption commission and repeal new laws that she says feeds corruption and drug trafficking.

"I believe firmly that the democratic socialism I propose is the solution to pull Honduras out of the abyss we have been buried in by neo-liberalism, a narco-dictator and corruption," Castro said in a campaign speech.

"Participatory democracy" in the form of referendums and consultations on big policy changes will be central to Castro's administration, according to a document outlining her government's plans. Previous attempts at more direct democracy in Latin America have at times conversely strengthened patronage politics and leaders' power.

Castro will also convene a national assembly that could allow her to overhaul the constitution, a proposal her husband Zelaya initiated shortly before his overthrow. The document is vague on the goal of the overhaul, but mentions guaranteeing social and economic rights.

When Zelaya was President Castro was especially active in policymaking and pushed for social programs and subsidies for poor children, women and the elderly, which helped build her popularity. She has also run agricultural and timber companies in the private sector. Despite similarities in policy, Zelaya did not take a big role in his wife's campaign. "Ex-president Zelaya knows that as party coordinator, he has a relationship of deferential respect to the president," said historian and longtime friend of the candidate Anarella Velez.



## Protesters Block Roads Across Lebanon



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Roadblocks were set up by demonstrators across much of cash-strapped Lebanon after the currency plummeted to a historic low.

Protesters across Beirut, Tripoli, Saida, and other cities closed highways and intersections on Monday morning with their vehicles, and put tyres and rubbish dumpsters on fire. They called on the government to control the plunging Lebanese pound, which for the past week has hovered at about 25,000 to the US dollar. The pound has lost about 90 percent of its value in about two years.

Mohammad, a taxi driver with his rental car parked at an intersection on Beirut's bustling Hamra Street, said it has become less costly to be unemployed than to work. "I can't afford to pay my weekly rental fees for my car, not including gasoline prices and my monthly expenses for the family," he told Al Jazeera. "And there are barely any customers."

The taxi driver said he has lost hope in political change, be it from the country's governing parties, or the slew of opposition political groups.

"I don't trust anyone any more. They're all liars and thieves. And I don't want charity. I want to just have a decent living," said Mohammad, who gave only his first name.

The Lebanese army was able to clear some closed intersections and thoroughfares. However, in Sports City just south of Beirut, protesters doused the highway with petrol so cars could not drive through, even if the army cleared the roadblock.

Anonymous calls to protest from across the country circulated on WhatsApp and other messaging apps over the weekend. Some political opposition groups said the demonstrations were organised by some of Lebanon's sectarian parties.

Over the past month, Lebanese authorities have increased petrol prices weekly as they continue to lift subsidies. They also partially lifted medicine subsidies, which increased the prices of several medications for chronic illnesses and mental health issues.

## Maduro Brands EU Electoral Observers "Spies"

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro denounced members of the European Union's (EU) electoral observation mission who monitored voting last weekend as "spies," and accused them of looking to "stain" the regional elections on their preliminary report.

Local and regional elections enjoyed better conditions than during previous voting, the EU mission said on Tuesday, though they raised concerns about arbitrary bans on candidates for administrative reasons, delays in opening voting centers and "extended use of state resources in the campaign," read more

"They looked to stain the electoral process (in a report) and they couldn't. A delegation of spies - they weren't observers - wandered freely around the country, spying on the country's social, economic and political life," Maduro said during a broadcast on state television.

The mission did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Voting last weekend was the first time in 15 years that the EU sent a mission to observe Venezuelan elections. The team included 1,000 observers who monitored voting in 22 out of 23 elections and the full report will be presented in two months.

In this election, opposition politicians contested votes for the first time since 2017. However, they were roundly beaten, picking up just three out of 23 governorships and 117 mayoral positions, with the ruling party winning 210 mayoral races.

Several mayoral races had yet to be called, and one governor's office - in Barinas state, a Chavismo stronghold - has not been called either.

"The European Union couldn't stain the electoral process, it was impeccable, beautiful," Maduro said.

The President will hold meetings in "the coming hours" with opposition

governors, he said, without giving further details. He also suggested the ruling Socialists could have lost in a few states and municipalities due to voters punishing the party at the polls.

## Latvia Calls For Permanent U.S. Troops To Guard Against Russia Threat



ADAZI MILITARY BASE (Dispatches) - Latvia needs a permanent U.S. military presence to deter Russia and wants to boost its defences with U.S. Patriot missiles, Defence Minister Artis Pabriks said as NATO's chief visited allied troops in the Baltic country.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was due to arrive in Latvia's capital Riga late on Monday before a meeting on Tuesday with 29 NATO counterparts. The alliance is alarmed by a Russian military build-up on Ukraine's borders.

"We need additional international assistance," Pabriks told Reuters. "We would like to have a permanent United States (military) presence in our country. And sea and air defense means basically going down to such systems as Patriot (surface-to-air missiles)."

NATO troops were rehearsing battle skills in a snowy Latvian woodland with camouflaged tanks and live rounds, with 1,500 troops seeking to stop an attack on Riga by disrupting and stalling the unidentified adversary's advance north of the city.

"Deterrence is critical," said Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John Benson, commander of the NATO battlegroup in Latvia.

Prompted by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Moscow's support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, NATO has deployed four multinational battalion-size battlegroups to defend Poland and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia since July 2017.

Moscow says it has no intention of invading the Baltics or Poland and accuses NATO of destabilising Europe by moving troops closer to Russia's borders. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said there was "no imminent threat" against NATO.

In May, Russia amassed 100,000 troops on its border with Ukraine, the highest number since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Western officials say. NATO says there was another large military build-up on Ukraine's border this month.

**Shanon**  
(adviser)

**Parsian**

**Darrous Apt (\$2500)**  
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J, balcony  
marble fl  
fireplace  
Fully Furn

**Zaferanieh Villa (\$5000)**  
1000sq.m  
600sq.m, pkg  
S/p, Sauna, J  
green yard  
Fully Furn

**(\$3000)**  
**Mahmoodieh**  
300sq.m, 4bdrs  
S/p, S, J, pkg  
maeble fl, F.F

**Niavaran Apts**  
(\$1800) 2bdrs, S/p  
(\$2200) 3bdrs, S/p

**(\$8000)**  
**5storey, 20bdrs**  
S/p, S, J, pkg  
nice green yard  
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**Sa`adat abad Apts**  
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# Gazprom Expects Record Full-Year Net Profit

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian state gas company Gazprom expects to post record net profit this year, with gas prices in its core European market forecast to keep rising through the fourth quarter, a company official said on a conference call on Monday.

Gazprom earlier reported record quarterly net profit of 581.8 billion roubles (\$7.8 billion) for the third quarter, reflecting high natural gas prices, and said it expected even higher earnings in the last three months of the year.



# China Leader Promises Africa 1b Covid Vaccine Doses

DIAMNIADIO (Dispatches) - China's president pledged to offer Africa one billion Covid vaccine doses on Monday, with the continent struggling to acquire enough jabs to immunize against the disease.

In a speech made via videolink to a China-Africa summit near Senegal's capital Dakar, President Xi Jinping said his country would donate 600 million doses directly.

A further 400 million doses would come from other sources, such as investments in production sites, which are sorely lacking across much of Africa.

Xi's promise comes as part of a forum between China and African states with an emphasis on trade and security, among other issues, held in the city of Diamniadio near Senegal's seaside capital.

China invests heavily in Africa, and is the continent's largest trading partner with direct trade worth over \$200 billion in 2019, according to the Chinese embassy in Dakar. Beijing has also donated millions of doses of its home-produced Sinopharm vaccine to poor African countries since the start of the pandemic.

Critics charge that China's largesse forms part of a diplomatic offensive, however.

"We must continue to fight together against Covid," Xi told the summit. "We must prioritise the protection of our people and close the vaccination gap".

Vaccination rates in Africa are low compared to the rest of the world, with many states at the mercy of foreign donations due to the lack of local production facilities and prohibitive costs of mass purchases. The summit in Senegal follows a visit this month from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal, against a backdrop of growing rivalry between Beijing and Washington.

Blinken discussed boosting local vaccine-production sites with leaders during the visit, and alluded to the sometimes fraught nature of the continent's deep relationship with China.

Last month, U.S. President Joe Biden also announced vaccine donations to Africa, pledging 17 million doses of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine to the African Union.

At the forum, Senegalese economy minister Amadou Hott told attendees that a shift in the commercial relationship with China was needed - away from projects financed by African governments taking on large debts. "We need more equity investment," he said, pushing for Chinese entrepreneurs to invest in local companies. Beijing has often faced accusations of "debt-trap diplomacy" due to the scale of its lending to developing countries in Africa and elsewhere, using its creditor status to extract diplomatic and commercial concessions.

Blinken, in his recent trip to Africa, made reference to the accusations without naming China explicitly, saying in an address in Nigeria that Africans have been "wary of the strings" that often come with foreign engagement".

But China rejects the charges. Wu Peng, the head of the Africa department at China's foreign ministry, told a news conference in Beijing on Friday that "debt-trap" accusations amount to a cliché. China takes debt sustainability seriously, state-run news agency Xinhua reported him as saying.

# Germany's Inflation Hits 29-Year High in November

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German consumer prices hit a 29-year high in November, preliminary data showed Monday, as soaring energy costs and supply chain disruptions weigh on Europe's top economy.

The annual inflation rate rose by 5.2%, accelerating for the fifth month in a row, with the surge partially driven by a 22% jump in energy prices, federal statistics agency Destatis said.

In October, prices had climbed by 4.5% year-on-year basis.

Germany's Bundesbank said earlier this month that inflation could spike to just under 6% this year.

The higher cost of living is being experienced across the eurozone at the moment, putting pressure on the European Central Bank (ECB) to tighten its ultra-loose monetary policy.

The ECB has so far insisted that the inflation surge in the 19-nation zone is transitory and is wary of acting too soon and potentially stifling the pandemic recovery. But Bundesbank Chief Jens Weidmann, who is stepping down at the end of the year, has warned that the price hikes could last longer than expected.

Using the ECB's preferred yardstick, the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), German inflation jumped to 6% in November - well above the bank's 2% target. Higher demand after the easing of coronavirus restrictions has pushed up energy prices and led to shortages of key materials and labor worldwide.



But Germany also suffers from the comparison effect with 2020, when the country introduced a temporary sales tax cut, as well as the introduction of carbon pricing at the start of 2021, according to Destatis.

Carsten Brzeski, an economist at ING Diba bank, called November's inflation figure "a shocker" but said the peak is yet to come.

"The December inflation number could be a new record high since German reunification," he said.

"One-off factors like base effects from higher energy prices and post lockdown price markups" will "gradually start to abate," he added.

"However, it could take until the end of 2022 before headline inflation drops below 2%, if not until 2023."

# Russia-EU Gas Transit Deal May Not Be Renewed

LONDON (Dispatches) - Ukraine's state energy firm Naftogaz has no power to halt the Nord Stream 2 pipeline being built between Russia and Germany, despite its role in the certification process, while its own transit deal with Russia may not be renewed, Naftogaz head Yuriy Vitrenko told Reuters on Monday.

Amid an energy crunch in Europe which has seen record gas price across the bloc, the market is closely watching for the signs whether the German authorities would be ready to certify soon the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that will carry more Russian gas to Europe's biggest economy - something Moscow has said should help to bring prices down.

It would bypass transit countries, particularly Ukraine, which has a history of gas pricing standoffs with Moscow, and with which Russia has a gas transit deal until 2024.

Vitrenko said it is possible there will be no gas supplies from Russia through the route beyond that date as there have been no discussions with Russia about extending the deal.

"There's nothing, not even a hint, no official or unofficial talks, (with Russia)... we are discussing it with the Americans and the Germans that all of us would like the transit to continue, but the Russians are reluctant to start these discussions," he said.

If the deal is not renewed, he said reliance on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines direct to Germany, would tighten Russia's grip on Europe's gas supplies, making the bloc more vulnerable to politically motivated supply disruptions and price spikes.

Germany's energy regulator earlier this month suspended the approval process for the new Nord Stream 2 pipeline and said the Swiss-based consortium behind the project first needed to form a German subsidiary company under German law to secure an operating license.

The regulator also granted a Ukrainian request to be included as part of the certification process.

This, Vitrenko said, means Ukraine has some access to documents submitted and has the right to be heard on the process but does not give it any power to halt its ultimate certification.

"There is no veto power whatsoever," he said.

He said Ukraine would be willing to challenge any ultimate certification of the project if it does not believe the project complies with European law.

"We hope it won't happen, but if it happens they certify it without full compliance with the spirit of the letter of European law then of course we will go to court," Vitrenko said.

# France Extends Stricter Controls On Foreign Ownership of Key Firms



PARIS (Dispatches) - France will extend by one year stricter measures on foreign ownership of companies it deems strategically important to the country, the French finance ministry said on Monday.

Foreign companies must receive French government permission if they want to take a stake of more than 10% in listed companies in sectors such as health, electronic communications, new technologies, aerospace, data centers, media and food safety - down from a 25% threshold before the pandemic.

The ministry said in a statement that biotechnology companies were also privy to foreign direct investment screening.

"We will not let any sensitive technology leave, we will not let foreign companies take control of sensitive French technology," Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told a news conference.

He said that as long as the pandemic continues and the economy remains unstable, strategic companies need to be protected, and it was for this reason the application threshold of the rule had been lowered.

"As soon as you want to take a 10% stake in a listed French company, you are subject to the foreign ownership decree if you are not a European player," Le Maire said.

Le Maire said the measure - which does not apply to European Union or European Economic Area companies - was extended from end-2021 to end-2022. He gave no indication what would happen after that date.

In January, France took a tough line against an attempted takeover of retailer Carrefour by Canada's Alimentation Couche-Tard, dealing a major blow to the near \$20 billion bid approach.

The French government had also spoken out in 2005 amid rumors that Danone might receive a takeover bid from PepsiCo Inc.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, President Emmanuel Macron has ramped up calls to protect French sovereignty in areas such as health care and industry.

# UN Program Offers Cash for Struggling Afghan Families

KABUL (Dispatches) - The UN World Food Program on Monday distributed cash in the Afghan capital to about 3,000 families severely hit by the country's growing humanitarian crisis since the Taliban seized power.

Global aid agencies have warned that more than half of Afghanistan's 38 million population are expected to face hunger this winter, as the country grapples with a deteriorating economy following the Islamists' return to power.

"I never imagined that one day I would be sitting here in a queue seeking help," said Bassana, aged 20, who lives with her family of 10.

"We will first buy food to avoid starving to death," she added.

The UN agency distributed 7,000 afghanis (\$74) to each family.

Azimullah Fazlyar, who was helping to distribute the money, said about 50,000 to 60,000 families were in need of support in Kabul and the program had identified the 3,000 worst affected.

"They can use the money in the winter to buy wood or whatever else they need," he said.

Many of those receiving aid were from families whose only breadwinner had lost their job since the Taliban takeover.

Inflation and unemployment have surged in Afghanistan, and international aid that made up 75 percent of the previous U.S.-backed government's budget has completely dried up.

Student and English teacher Saniulla Hamidi was among those queuing for help.

He said he and his father, a government employee, had both been left out of work, meaning he is unable to continue his studies.

"I just wish I could pay (my fees) and return to my university," Hamidi said.

The United States and the Taliban are due to hold talks this week in Qatar on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and other issues.



# Japan's Economy to Recover From Pandemic Pain

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda voiced confidence the country's economy will overcome the

impact of the coronavirus pandemic in coming months due to dramatic progress made in vaccinating the population.

"I'm quite sure the Japanese economy would overcome the impact of Covid-19 in coming months, and would be on a recovery and growth phase within a couple months," he said at a Paris Europlace forum.

Kuroda made the remarks before reading a prepared speech on green finance, underscoring the BOJ's intention of communicating to markets its optimism over the world's third-largest economy.

The BOJ next meets for a rate review on December 16-17. It is set to keep monetary settings unchanged and may decide whether to extend a set of pandemic-relief lending programs beyond their current March 2022 deadline.

Japan has lagged other advanced nations in making a strong recovery from the pandemic's hit as state of emergency curbs to combat the virus weighed on consumption.

While the September 30 lifting of the curbs has given rise to hopes of a rebound in consumption, supply bottlenecks and parts shortages have disrupted manufacturers' production and weighed on the export-reliant economy.

Concerns over Japan's fragile recovery have prompted the government to unveil a record \$490 billion (RM2 trillion) spending package earlier this month, bucking a global trend towards withdrawing crisis-mode stimulus measures.



## Hertha Berlin Sack Coach, Bring in Korkut

**B**ERLIN (Dispatches) - Hertha Berlin, currently sitting 14th in the Bundesliga, sacked Pal Dardai as coach on Monday, replacing the Hungarian with former Turkey international Tayfun Korkut.

Hertha's 1-1 home draw against Augsburg on Saturday saw the team stretch to four their winless streak, which included a 2-0 capital derby defeat by Union.

Dardai, 45, rejoined Hertha in January this year after having been sacked a first time in 2019.

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## Club World Cup to Be Held in UAE in February

**L**AUSANNE (Dispatches) - The FIFA Club World Cup, initially set to be held in Japan in December, will now be held in the United Arab Emirates in February, world football's governing body announced.

The Club World Cup will run from February 3-12, featuring eight matches between the champions of the six continental confederations along with the top team in the host nation.

The competition draw will be held in Zurich later today (1600 GMT).

# Messi Wins Ballon d'Or For Seventh Time

**P**ARIS (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi admitted winning the Copa America with Argentina might have been the determining factor in him claiming the men's Ballon d'Or prize for the seventh time after a turbulent year, as Spain's Alexia Putellas took the women's award.

Now 34, Messi pipped much-fancied rivals like Robert Lewandowski and Karim Benzema to take the award in a glittering ceremony on Monday in Paris, the city he now calls home after leaving boyhood club Barcelona for Paris Saint-Germain in August.

Despite his tearful goodbye from Barcelona and his relatively underwhelming start to life in France, the jury of journalists from around the world rewarded him in particular for captaining Argentina to their first major international title since 1993.

"Two years ago I thought I was coming into my final years but here I am again back here," said Messi, who won the last edition of the Ballon d'Or in 2019 before last year's awards were cancelled due to the pandemic.

Messi also won in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and in 2015.

"People were starting to ask me when I was going to retire but now I am here in Paris and I am very happy," he said at the Chatelet Theatre in central Paris, where he was joined by his wife Antonella Rocuzzo and their three children.

"I don't know how many more years I have left but I hope there will be many because I am really enjoying myself this year. "What I achieved with Argentina was a dream come true. I think I won this trophy thanks to what we did at the Copa America, so I dedicate it to my teammates."

Argentina beat Brazil 1-0 in the final in Rio de Janeiro as Messi won a major title with his country for the first time. He also scored 38 goals in 48 games in his final season with Barcelona and won the Copa del Rey.

However Messi has played just 11 times and scored four goals for PSG since joining the French club and there was a feeling that this year might see a different winner.



Poland striker Lewandowski would have been a shoe-in in 2020, when he scored 45 goals in 37 games for Bayern, only for the awards to be cancelled.

He ended last season with a remarkable 41 Bundesliga goals but had to settle for second place in the voting for the Ballon d'Or, which is organized by France Football magazine and voted for by a panel of journalists from around the world.

Lewandowski instead was given a consolation prize for the year's best goal-scorer and received glowing praise from Messi.

"I wanted to say to Robert that it was an honour to go up against him. He deserved to win it last year," Messi said.

Midfielder Jorginho, who won the Champions League with Chelsea and Euro 2020 with Italy, came third, followed by Real Madrid's Karim Benzema and another Chelsea player, N'Golo Kante.

Five-time winner Cristiano Ronaldo came sixth. He was absent from the ceremony.

Between them, Messi and Ronaldo have won 12 of the last 13 editions of the Ballon d'Or with the exception coming in 2018 when Luka Modric claimed the prize.

This is just the third year that a women's Ballon d'Or has been awarded, with Putellas following in the footsteps of Norway's Ada Hegerberg, winner in 2018, and the United States' 2019 World Cup superstar Megan Rapinoe.

Spain international Putellas, 27, captained Barcelona to victory in this year's Champions League, scoring a penalty in the final as her side hammered Chelsea 4-0.

She also won a Spanish league and cup double with Barca, the club she joined as a teenager in 2012 and who are fast becoming the dominant force in the women's game.



**P**ARIS (Dispatches) - Neymar is expected to be sidelined for between six and eight weeks after sustaining ligament damage to his left ankle, Paris Saint-Germain said on Monday.

The Brazil star was stretchered from the pitch in tears after suffering the injury in the final minutes of Sunday's 3-1 victory at Saint-Etienne.

"The examinations carried out last night confirm that Neymar Jr is suffering from a sprained left ankle with ligament damage," PSG said in a statement, adding that a further update would be made in 72 hours.

Neymar had started 13 of the past 15 games for PSG this season after an injury-plagued four years in France, but he faces another lengthy absence after landing awkwardly following a challenge by Saint-Etienne's Yvann Macon.

The 29-year-old posted a video Monday of himself wearing a pressotherapy boot on his left leg. "These runs of bad luck are part of an athlete's life," he said Sunday on Instagram. "That's the way it is now, you have to pick yourself back up and move forward. I'll be back better and stronger."

Neymar should return in time for the last 16 of the Champions League in mid-February. PSG are guaranteed to advance as runners-up of Group A behind Manchester City.

## FIFA to Trial Semi-Automated Offside Technology at Arab Cup

**Z**URICH (Dispatches) - World Soccer's governing body FIFA will test its semi-automated offside technology at the Arab Cup 2021 which begins in Qatar on Tuesday, with Chief Refereeing Officer Pierluigi Collina saying the competition represented its most important trial so far.

The technology is based on limb tracking and provides the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) with information before the on-field official takes a final call.

"We'll have a camera setup installed under the roof of each stadium," FIFA's Football Technology and Innovation Director Johannes Holzmueller said in a statement on Monday.

"The limb-tracking data extracted from the video will be sent to the operations rooms and the calculated offside line and detected kick-point is provided to the replay operator in almost real time.

"The replay operator then has the opportunity to show it immediately to the VAR. At the FIFA Arab Cup the assistant VAR at a dedicated offside station can immediately validate and confirm the information." FIFA's Chief of Global Football Development Arsene Wenger said in April that he hoped the organization would be ready to implement the technology at next year's World Cup in Qatar.

In March, former Netherlands forward Marco van Basten called on football's lawmakers to consider scrapping the offside rule, saying that the sport would be better off without it.

The game has seen several contentious offside calls since the introduction of the VAR, with growing concern about the time taken and the precision with which offsides are judged. "Technology is very important and useful in both the pre-match preparation and the decision-making process during matches," Collina said.

"In an offside incident, the decision is made after having analyzed not only the players' position but also their involvement in the move.

"Technology - today or tomorrow - can draw a line but the assessment of an interference with play or with an opponent remains in the referee's hands."

## Man Utd Appoint Rangnick as Interim Manager



competitions which left them eighth in the Premier League standings.

**M**ANCHESTER (Reuters) - Manchester United have named German Ralf Rangnick as interim manager until the end of the season, the Premier League club said on Monday, eight days after sacking Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

Rangnick, 63, steps in to replace the Norwegian, who was removed after United's 4-1 defeat by Watford earlier this month, their seventh loss in 13 games across all

"Manchester United is delighted to announce the appointment of Ralf Rangnick as interim manager until the end of the season, subject to work visa requirements," said a club statement.

"Following this period, Ralf and the club have agreed that he will continue in a consultancy role for a further two years."

United's former midfielder Michael Carrick, one of Solskjaer's assistants, took charge of the team for their Champions League victory at Villarreal last Tuesday, and oversaw the 1-1 draw with Chelsea in the Premier League on Sunday.

Carrick will remain in charge of the first team until Rangnick's work visa is finalized.

United, who are languishing eighth in the table with 18 points from 13 games, host Arsenal in the league on Thursday.

## Croatia Reach Semis at Davis Cup Finals

**T**URIN (Dispatches) - Croatia became the first team through to the last four of the Davis Cup Finals after doubles pair Nikola Mekic and Mate Pavic beat Italian duo Fabio Fognini and Jannik Sinner to seal a 2-1 victory in Turin.

Sinner had battled back from the brink of defeat to beat Marin Cilic and take the tie to a decider after lowly-ranked Borna Gojo shocked Lorenzo Sonego to put 2018 champions Croatia in the driving seat in the tie.

World number one pair Mekic and Pavic proved too strong as they silenced the crowd in the Pala Alpitour Arena to claim a straightforward 6-3 6-4 victory in one hour 19 minutes.

Croatia, who reached the quarter-finals by topping Group D last week, will face either Serbia or Kazakhstan for a place in Sunday's final which will be held in Madrid.

The 20-year-old Sinner had earlier kept Italy afloat with a battling 3-6 7-6(4) 6-3 defeat of Cilic.

Former U.S. Open champion Cilic served for the match at 5-4 in the second set but wavered badly to let his Italian opponent off the hook. Sinner was rock-solid in the tiebreak to take the match into a decider in which he broke serve in the first game.

Cilic did respond with a break back but from 3-3 in the deciding set Sinner took charge to claim a great win.

It all proved in vain though as Sinner and Fognini could make little impression on Croatia's doubles specialists.

Earlier, the 23-year-old Gojo, ranked 279th in the world, beat top-30 player Sonego 7-6(2) 2-6 6-2.



## Djokovic Likely to Skip Australian Open

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic is unlikely to play at the Australian Open if rules on COVID-19 vaccinations are not relaxed, the world number one's father, Srđjan Djokovic, said.

Organizers of the year's first Grand Slam have said that all players will have to be vaccinated to take part.

Djokovic has so far declined to disclose whether he is vaccinated and his father told Serbia's TV Prva that governing body Tennis Australia's stance on players being vaccinated was tantamount to "blackmail".

"As far as vaccines and non-vaccines are concerned, it is the personal right of each of us whether we will be vaccinated or not. No one has the right to enter into our intimacy," news website B92 quoted Srđjan as saying.

"Under these blackmails and conditions, (Djokovic) probably won't (play). I wouldn't do that. And he's my son, so you decide for yourself."

Djokovic has won nine Grand Slam titles at Melbourne Park, including this year's tournament, and shares the record of 20 men's Grand Slam titles with Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal.

Nadal has confirmed he will play at Melbourne Park in January but Federer will miss the tournament as he recovers from another knee surgery.

The Australian Open begins on Jan. 17.

