

Health Ministry Announced on Monday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 130,277 With 77 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Syrian Foreign Minister Said that Iran and Syria Economic Relations Were Among Discussed Issues Between Him and His Iranian Counterpart, and Also With President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi

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No Interim Agreement on Agenda in Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Stating that Iran has entered talks with 'serious will' for sanction removal, the Foreign Ministry Spokesman said that there is no interim agreement on the agenda in Vienna talks.

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

Answering a question about the developments in Afghanistan, Khatibzadeh said, "The future of Afghanistan must be decided according to the will of the people of the country. Certainly, no government that is inclusive can guarantee the future of Afghanistan as a peaceful, stable country with a clear path to development."

In response to a question about the comments made that the missile program, the interim agreement and the FATF have been discussed in Vienna talks, the spokesman said, "We are negotiating on the basis of drafts to lift the sanctions and how to stop Iran's compensatory measures against the lifting of the sanctions. There is no such thing as a step-by-step plan or an interim agreement in Vienna talks."

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Iran Oil Exports In Good State

TEHRAN (Shana) -- A member of the presidium of the Energy Committee of the Islamic Consultative Assembly said: "Iran's oil exports are in a favorable condition and we will experience better conditions by bartering oil with goods and services."

Hossein Hosseinzadeh said that according to Central Bank statistics and a report presented by Iranian Minister of Petroleum Javad Owji at a joint parliamentary-administration meeting with members of the parliament's energy committee, the country's oil sales grew significantly compared to last year.

"I also believe that the trend of oil sales is increasing compared to the past and petrochemical exports are in a good condition," he said.

He added: "Currently, in addition to increasing oil exports, we must have a long-term and pivotal view on the maintenance and protection of oil reserves, because this issue can lead to the further development of the oil and petrochemical industry."

Tehran Backs Security of Persian Gulf Countries



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Stating that the security of the countries of the region is intertwined, President Raisi said in a meeting with the Emirati national security adviser that Iran supports the security of the Persian Gulf littoral states.

Speaking in a meeting with the National Security Advisor of the UAE Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Monday, Raisi said, "There should be no obstacle in the relations between the two Muslim countries of Iran and the UAE, and these relations must not be influenced by the outsiders."

"The policy of the enemies of regional countries is to create fear among the neighbors, but this conspiracy will be thwarted with common wisdom and understanding," he added.

The President described supporting the Muslim people of the region as the Islamic Republic's definite policy, adding, "The Zionists in the region are pursuing their sinister goals and wherever they can find a foothold, they will turn it into a tool for expansionism; therefore, regional countries should be careful."

"The security of the countries of the region is intertwined and Iran supports the security of the Persian Gulf littoral states," he noted.

The UAE National Security Adviser, for his part, said, "We are the children of this region and we have a common destiny, so the development of relations between the two countries is on our agenda."

Referring to his detailed talks with his Iranian counterpart Ali Shamkhani, Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan said, "These meetings will be a turning point in the relations between the two countries."

"We are ready to develop cooperation and hope that a new chapter of relations between the two countries will begin with the visit of Iranian President Raisi to the UAE," he added.

During the meeting, the UAE National Security Adviser informed the President of the official invitation of the President of the UAE to visit the country.

Iran to Builds 45,000 Cars for World's Largest Bi-Fuel Fleet

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Oil Ministry and Iran Khodro have signed a contract worth \$20 million to produce 45,000 bi-fuel cars, expanding the world's largest fleet of vehicles running on either petrol or natural gas in the country.

The contract, signed between the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) and the country's biggest automaker, is in line with the state plan pushing motorists to use cheaper, cleaner and plentiful natural gas.

It "is based on the decision of the Supreme Economic Coordination Council to support production and conversion of gasoline-powered public vehicles, taxis, vans, pickup trucks and passenger cars to CNG-burning equivalents with the aim of increasing revenues from gasoline sales and observing civil rights and environmental requirements," the Ministry of Petroleum said in a statement.

Under the scheme, Iran Khodro will produce 40,000 taxis and 5,000 pickup trucks that will be powered by either gasoline or compressed natural gas (CNG).

The government is subsidizing and providing low-interest installment plans for conversion systems.

The Oil Ministry will pay \$505 for production of each dual-fuel pickup truck and \$425 for each taxi compliant with Euro 4 and Euro 5 emissions standards, it said. Natural gas is a cleaner-burning, less costly fuel than gasoline, and vehicles powered by compressed natural gas typically emit 20 percent less greenhouse gases than gas-powered cars.

Iran boasts the largest number of CNG vehicles where more than 4 million compressed natural gas cars operate against more than 16 million globally. There are currently about 2,500 CNG stations mostly operated by the private sector across Iran that supply 22% of the country's fuel basket.

According to NIOPDC, each cubic meter of CNG consumption saves the consumer 30 cents in comparison to one liter of gasoline. Its former head Alireza Sadeqabadi was quoted as saying in March that developing the CNG industry could potentially save Iran \$14 billion.

Sadeqabadi said Iran would need at least \$15 billion of investment to boost its gasoline production capacity by 20 million liters, but an equivalent CNG output would only need \$1 billion.

Iran's unlocking of its vast reserves of natural gas, estimated as the world's largest, has produced a boom in supplies and driven down prices, increasing interest in the fuel.

Most bi-fuel cars plying Iran's roads are fleet vehicles such as cabs and pickup trucks, but natural gas as a motor fuel also represents a huge and largely untapped opportunity for commercial fleets and long-haul trucks.

Cars powered by natural gas feature a powertrain that switches from compressed natural gas to gasoline seamlessly. They are praised for savings on fuel, but a major drawback is driving range and reduced power anxiety associated with such vehicles. Iranian authorities are encouraging more drivers to switch to bi-fuel systems by subsidizing vehicle conversions.

Imports of Basic Goods Up 62% in 8 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran imported 20.322 million tons of basic goods worth \$12.436 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), 62 percent more than the figure for last year's same period.

According to the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Rohollah Latifi, the imports of basic goods in the mentioned eight months also increased by 30 percent in terms of weight.

The mentioned goods accounted for 75 percent of the country's total imports in terms of weight and 38 percent of the total value of the imports during the said period.

Sugar, wheat, basic machinery, chemical fertilizers, soybean meal, edible oils, oilseeds, barley, and corn were among the imported basic goods.

The value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 40 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

According to IRCI Head Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi, Iran traded over 110.3 million tons of non-oil products worth \$63.1 billion with other countries in the mentioned period.

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Iran Minerals Export Hit 105% Growth In 7 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian companies active in mining and mineral sector exported \$7,059,000,000 worth of mineral products during the first seven months of the current year, registering a 105 percent hike.

Iran's export of minerals to other countries in the first seven months of the current year (from March 21 to Oct. 22) showed a significant 105 percent growth as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

According to the report, 31,084,000 tons of minerals were exported from the country, valued at more than \$7 billion during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year, indicating a 105 and 9 percent growth in terms of value and weight respectively.

The growth of global prices caused the export of Iranian mining and minerals to exceed \$7 billion in this period.

The highest value of exports in terms of value is allocated to steel chain and related products which stood at \$4,045,620,000 accounts for 57.3% of the country's total exports.

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There Is Room for Further Negotiations

TEHRAN (MNA) - Stating that a common language can be achieved with patience, Russia's Permanent Representative for Vienna-based International Organizations urged all parties to refrain from hasty conclusions.

Referring to recent remarks by a senior Iranian foreign ministry official, Russia's Permanent Representative for Vienna-based International Organizations said that Iran's tone shows that there is room for further negotiations.

"The tone of these comments demonstrates that there is room for further negotiations, to my mind. As I repeatedly said to all our counterparts at the #ViennaTalks, patience, just patience and we will find common language. Let's refrain from hasty conclusions," Mikhail Ulyanov, who heads the Russian delegation at the Vienna talks said in a post on his Twitter account on Monday.

Ulyanov's tweet came in response to a senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official who said, "I think European parties & the US, did not expect Iran to enter into Vienna talks with a full text... That's why the other parties, since receiving these drafts, raised the idea of a pause in the talks so as to return to capitals for consultations."

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Iran, Pakistan Confer on Joint Police Cooperation

ISLAMABAD (IP) - The CID Police Chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NAJA) visited the headquarters of the Pakistan Federal Investigation Agency in Islamabad, the capital of the Asian country.

The Iranian delegation headed by Brigadier-General Mohammad Ghanbari visited the headquarters of the Pakistan Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Monday morning and met with Sanaullah Abbasi, the Director-General of FIA, to discuss joint cooperation, reported Iran press.

The CID Police Chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Director-General of FIA discussed bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad in the fight against economic, cyberspace, anti-trafficking and other classified crimes.

Tehran Never Shies Away From Defending Its National Security

TEHRAN (MNA) – Foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has stressed that Iran never shies away from defending its national security and preserving its territorial integrity.

Amir-Abdollahian made the comments in a joint press conference with the Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad in Tehran on Monday.

The top Iranian diplomat said that Iran condemns the presence of foreign troops on the Syrian soil who are there without gaining the permission of the democratically elected Syrian government.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir-Abdollahian pointed to the situation in Afghanistan and reiterated Iran's call for the formation of an inclusive government in the country.

He also pointed to the humanitarian aid Iran has given the Afghan people despite being under sanctions.

Amir-Abdollahian called on the ruling interim government in Afghanistan to pay more attention to pay more serious attention to security on the shared borders with Iran.

"An incidence happened a few days ago at one of our border points and our armed forces vigorously responded to that uncoordinated action," he said in an apparent reference to skirmishes between Iranian armed forces with unknown armed men shooting at Iranian farmers and military checkpoints from the other side of the border in Afghan Nimruz Province.

"We formally protested against this limited border attack, and our armed forces dealt with these elements with might and immediately," he added.

Later in his remarks, the Iranian foreign minister also pointed to the occasional



attacks by the Zionist regime on Syria, saying that the Zionist regime is the root cause of insecurity in the West Asian region. He also pointed out that Syria is at the forefront of defending the Resistance that will not backtrack on defending its security.

Elsewhere, the foreign minister pointed to the first round of the Vienna talks between Iran and the P4+1 after the new Iranian administration took office and said, "We are looking for a good agreement through solid, strong and logical negotiations."

He reiterated Tehran's seriousness in the talks to secure the removal of the sanctions while calling into question the seriousness of the western parties in the negotiations despite their rush for holding the Vienna talks.

"The Westerners in the negotiations must have initiative and good faith. The new government's goal is to pursue the full removal of sanctions, and our goal at the Vienna talks is to secure the removal of the sanctions and get everyone back to their commitments," the Iranian foreign minister concluded.

Lifting Sanctions Top Priority for Gov't

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi said the lifting and neutralizing of the anti-Tehran sanctions is a top priority for his administration.

In an interview with the national TV on Sunday night, President Raisi said a taskforce has been formed to neuter the bans.

He added that at the same time, his administration is pursuing the removal of the sanctions but it will not tie the budget of the next fiscal year and Iran's economy to them.

Raisi referred the Vienna talks last week that are aimed at removing the anti-Iran sanctions. He said the Western governments thought that Iran would not participate in the talks or would not negotiate, but we put forward two documents during the Vienna talks.

Raisi also thanked all Iranians for their help with the vaccination campaign to contain the Covid outbreak in the country.

He said before the vaccination drive gathered steam, people searched for vaccines to get inoculated, but now authorities are after people to inoculate them.

Raisi also expressed pleasure at the downward trend in Covid deaths and infections in Iran. He said 100 days after his oath-taking as president, over 100 million doses of vaccine have been administered to people in Iran.

The president however urged people to observe health protocols so that Iran will avert another wave of Covid.

Elsewhere, Raisi referred to his administration's efforts to boost ties with other countries, especially neighbors. He said since his visit to Tajikistan several weeks ago, trade with the country has increased by three hundred percent. The president added that after the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, the government instructed economic activists to take action to use the capacity of the SCO members to the full.

According to Raisi, during his first days in office, Iran renewed relations with Turkmenistan and signed a gas swap deal with the country, which can resolve Iran's gas shortages.

The president said his administration's foreign policy is to have active and maximum relations with neighbors and other world countries.

Raisi said he held in-person meetings and telephone conversations during his first days in office in which he declared Iran's readiness to develop ties in all areas with the world.

Iran Seeking to Strengthen Tehran-Damascus Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Emphasizing strengthening the foundations of the relations between Iran and Syria, especially in the economic and trade fields, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi described the two countries' relations as strategic.

Speaking in a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria Faisal Mekdad on Monday, Raisi said, "Today, long-term, comprehensive planning should be done to develop and deepen relations between Tehran and Damascus."

The President described the volume of trade and economic exchanges between the two countries much lower than the desired level, saying, "There are many capacities to increase the volume and amount of economic exchanges between the two countries, by activating which, the volume of economic exchanges can be increased several times."

Raisi pointed to the illegal presence of foreign forces in the region and in Syria, calling it dangerous for the security and stability of the region, saying, "ISIL is made by the Americans and today the presence of ISIL and the United States everywhere in the region is a great damage to security, stability and peace of peoples."

"Great martyrs such as Haj Qasem Soleimani crippled the United States and its proxy groups in the region, including ISIL and Zionist terrorism," Raisi pointed out.

The Iranian President stressed the importance of maintaining Syria's security and stability and its authoritative presence in regional equations and said, "Today, Syria is at the forefront of resistance against the Zionists with its anti-Zionist approach and the history of the resistance of Syrian people and government against cowardly aggression will be proudly recorded."

Emphasizing the need to respect the territorial integrity of Syria, the President said, "Ignoring the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries by any country is not acceptable and the Syrian people will certainly not tolerate it."

Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, for his part, conveyed the message of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and invited President Raisi to visit the country, saying, "Syria is determined to activate all capacities for cooperation with the aim of growing Tehran-Damascus relations in the interest of the two nations."

The Syrian people will never forget the support and assistance of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said, adding, "Syria puts a great emphasis on the continuation of the sustainable, powerful relations that the leaders of the two nations have created, and the blood of Martyr Soleimani guarantees the deep bond between the two nations and we believe that Martyr Soleimani belongs to all of us and we will not forget the sacrifice of our martyrs."

Faisal Mekdad pointed out, "The United States uses the vilest methods in its relations with some countries in the region and seeks to dominate and humiliate the Zionists in the region by disrespecting and humiliating them."

"With the resistance of the Syrian people and the Resistance Front, the conspiracies of the United States, the Zionist Regime and its allies in the region have failed, and today they have reached the point that Syria has not failed and have changed their approach," he said.

Sustainable Security to Be Ensured by Regional Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Monday that sustainable stability and tranquility can only be brought in light of cooperation among the regional countries.

Shamkhani made the remarks in a meeting held in Tehran with the visiting National Security Adviser of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed.

Cordial and friendly ties with neighbors, economic exchange, and investment are among Iranian foreign policy's top priorities, Shamkhani said in the meeting.

In his remarks, the top security official stressed the necessity of not being influenced by the extra-regional policies.

He went on to say that the Persian Gulf littoral states through cooperation can not only bring welfare and development for their nations but also play an important role in the world and regional economy.

Further, he described dialogue as a substitute for military approaches to solve the disputes.

Then, Shamkhani hoped that the visit of Emirati security advisor to Iran would lead to opening a new chapter in bilateral relations.

For his part, Sheikh Tahnoun said that expansion of relations with Iran is among his country's priorities.

He further described Iran as a great powerful country with unique geopolitical situation.

In his remarks, the Emirati official said the two can foster cooperation in the areas of transit, energy, transportation, health, and investment.

He went on to say that formation of working groups will help develop cooperation, review grounds for relations, identify obstacles, and find ways to remove them.

S. Korea, UNDP Cooperate to Save Iran's Hamun Lake

TEHRAN (IP) - South Korea and UN Development Program (UNDP) will cooperate in easing the pressures on the Hamun Lake in southeastern Iran.

: Director-General of environment department of Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan, Vahid Pourmardan said that the revival of Hamun Lake would get more acceleration with the cooperation of

international organizations and the experience of the developed countries.

This project will change the level of jobs and salaries of local people.

The UNDP representative to Iran, Claudio Provides, for his part, appreciated the moves to save the lake and announced the UNDP's readiness to cooperate for the implementation of long and short-term objectives of the plans with regards to the regional priorities.

Hamun is the third largest lake in Iran after the Caspian Sea and Urmia Lake and the seventh-largest international wetland.

It also is one of the biosphere reserves in Iran.

GC Rejects Parliament Bill On Car Imports

TEHRAN (IFP)- A spokesman for Iran's Guardian Council has said in a tweet that the body has rejected a parliamentary bill to allow car imports.

Hadi Tahan Nazif said the Guardian Council views the car imports permission as being against Clause 2 of the Iranian Constitution's Article 110.

Tahan Nazif added the council is sending the ratification back to Parliament for correction.

Any bill passed by the Iranian Parliament must be reviewed and approved by the Guardian council to become law.

Iran has banned the importing of cars for the past three years. The ban on car imports has shot up automobile prices, especially foreign cars, in Iran up to ten-fold over the past years.

The parliamentary bill to resume the import of cars aimed to balance the Iranian auto market.

Iran Proposes Direct Flights to Kyrgyzstan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian called for the launch of direct flights to Kyrgyzstan in order to facilitate visits by the business people, tourists and political delegations of the two countries.

In a meeting in Tehran, Amirabdollahian and Vice Chairman of the Security Council of Kyrgyzstan Talatbek Masadykov talked about a range of issues.

The top Iranian diplomat explained the policy of the new Iranian government toward neighbors, saying the recent exchange of delegations between Iran and Kyrgyzstan shows the determination of the two sides to promote cooperation and develop relations.

Amirabdollahian also underlined the need for a long-term horizon for cooperation between the two countries, the Foreign Ministry's website reported.

He also congratulated Kyrgyzstan on successfully holding its recent parliamentary elections and stressed that Tehran and Bishkek should pave the way for expanding ties through establishing direct flights between the two capitals in order to facilitate visits by businesspeople, political delegations and tourists.

Amirabdollahian also stressed that cooperation between Iran and Kyrgyzstan in transportation and transit and the pilot operation of the Kyrgyzstan-Bandar Abbas railway corridor to connect Kyrgyzstan to the West Asian region are important for the two countries.

For his part, Masadykov described the talks between the top diplomats of the two countries on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly as important and expressed hope that with the end of the election period in Kyrgyzstan, a new round of cooperation between the two countries in various fields, including economic cooperation, would be formed based on existing capacities.

He also stressed the need for cooperation between the two countries in combating drug trafficking and exchange of experience in border protection. Afghanistan and the current developments in the country were other topics discussed by Amirabdollahian and Masadykov.

Outlining Iran's views about Afghanistan, Amirabdollahian stressed the need to form a comprehensive government that would include all ethnic groups in Afghanistan with the aim of stabilizing the country and establishing peace.

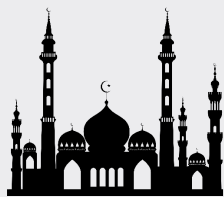
Iran, Iraq to Boost Knowledge-Based Partnership

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the economic department of the Iraqi administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran announced the expansion of the fields of cooperation of Iranian-based scholars with Iraq.

Javad Karimi, the head of the economic section of the Iraqi Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, said at the Sunday export event with the approach of accepting the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Trade and Technology Board: "Agriculture, Petro chemistry, Housing and Medical and pharmaceutical Services are among the areas and requirements of the Kurdistan region in which Iranian companies should be active."

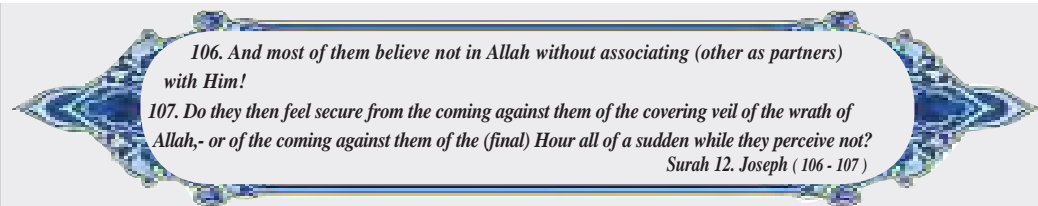
Karimi added: "With joint production, Iran can enter the Arab world market; Because Iraq is the gateway for Iran to enter the Arab world, and this is the vision towards which we must move."

Emphasizing that it is very important for knowledge-based companies to cooperate with partners in the Iraqi Kurdistan region in priority areas, Karimi said: "At the construction industry exhibition pavilion held in Erbil, we saw that Iranian knowledge-based companies found good partners. This shows that there is good potential for cooperation."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:55
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:10
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:32
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:01



Iran Exports to Armenia Soar by 60%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce Hervik Yarjanian says Iran's exports to Armenia have been over \$200b in the first seven months of the current year which shows 60% growth comparing to the same period last year.

Speaking to ILNA and touching upon the launch of the joint industrial park between Iran and Armenia, Yarjanian said that Armenian sides with cooperation with the industrial parks of Iran are to create an industrial pardis (industrial park) which will be on a 50-hectar area and it is considered a joint investment and this pardis will be allocate for the industrial and medium industries.

He added that the project has been endorsed by the Armenian government and it is facing its legal process, adding that this pardis is in the framework of a deal which has been signed between the Armenian economic minister and head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization during the joint economic commission of the two states.

He then pointed to the trade volume of the two states and said currently Armenia is the 15th export destination of Iran and Iran's exports to this country in the first seven months of the current year has been over \$200m which shows 60% growth year-on-year, reiterating that cement tomato paste, fruits, pipe and profile, urea, tile, ceramic and bitumen have been the major exported items to Armenia in this period.

He noted by the way Iran's imports from Armenia have been around \$15m in the same period which shows 50% growth.

Asked about Iran's exports of vehicles to Armenia, he said Iran currently has no car export to Armenia, adding that of course an Armenian company had talks to buy



some 100 Nisan pickups but due to the sudden rise in the prices, it was almost halted because the price of the Chinese like are by far much cheaper than Iran's.

Reacting to employment of Iranian shepherds in Armenia, he said so far he cannot confirm it because there is no valid information or detail on it, adding that Iranian companies are active in export of technical and engineering services to Armenia and some groups from Iran travel to Armenia because it is a very specialized matter.

Yarjanian added that the market of warm meat is very attractive one in the world and Armenia has good areas for breeding ship and livestock but it is strange that Armenia has published advertisement to hire Iranian shepherds and maybe the advertisement has come by the Iranian companies which have invested in Armenia and they prefer to hire Iranian forces.

He then added that the transit of goods between the two states is done easily and there is no problem but the Armenian roads due to recent incidents needed some repairs which have been done and the transit is underway.

He noted that Armenia is preparing a replacement for the current road which will be launched with a budget over one billion dollars which will launch the south-north corridor to reduce the time of transit from 8 to four hours.

FAO Commemorates the World Soil Day 2021

TEHRAN (FAO) - The Ministry of Agriculture Jihad and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) held an event to commemorate the World Soil Day.

"It is almost impossible to rate the importance of soil and its functions as they all are vital to our daily life and well-being. The primary and fundamental function of soils is to support food and agricultural systems globally. Therefore,

it is our duty to take concrete steps which protect this precious, non-renewable natural resource."

said Mr Gerold Bödeker, FAO Representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran, in his remarks at the event.

The theme of this year's World Soil Day - Halt soil salinization, boost soil productivity - intends to focus our attention on the importance of healthy soils and advocating sustainable management of soil resources.

FAO has prioritized the sustainable management of natural resources including through its on-going project "Technical Support to Water and Soil Rehabilitation for Improved Climate Resilience in Golestan, Khouzestan and Lorestan Provinces" funded by FAO's Technical Cooperation Program.

"FAO urges its member countries to adopt policies motivating a wide spectrum of stakeholders to pursue farming practices that promote the sustainable management of soils, and the Organization stands ready to further collaborate with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and other national and international partners," said Mr Bödeker in his concluding remarks.

Gov't Plans Sales of Shares in PGPIC, Largest Divestiture Ever

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The government is to sell its shares in the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Corporation (PGPIC), in what is expected to be the largest divestiture in the country's asset sales program.

Head of the Iranian Privatization Organization Hossein Ghorbanzadeh said that government stake in PGPIC, which amounts to 18% of the total shares in the company, will be sold through a listing on the local stock market in the near future.

Ghorbanzadeh said the divestiture will be the largest in Iran's history if the sell-off takes place in one single block trade.

"Naturally this will be the largest sell-off in the history of government's stake divestitures in rial terms," said the official without elaborating on how much the company has been valued in Iran's official currency terms.

The Iranian Oil Ministry has the controlling shares in PGPIC, the second largest petrochemical company in the Middle East and one of the most profitable in the world.

The holding controls a group of major petrochemical plants and chemical factories in Iran, many of them feeding on the country's vast natural gas reserves located in the Persian Gulf.

PGPIC has been blacklisted by the United States as part of Washington's efforts to deprive Iran of its lucrative oil sector revenues.

However, growing sales of the company in the past three years have played a major role in Iran's efforts to offset the impacts of American sanctions on the country's economy.

Speaking to the official IRNA news agency, Ghorbanzadeh said that another option for divesting government stake in PGPIC would be to offer the shares in three large blocks with each block containing 6% of the shares.



The Parsian Hotels Company is Celebrating its 22nd Anniversary



The 22nd anniversary of the creation of Parsian International Hotels Company was celebrated on Tuesday, December 29. The event was attended by staff managers, hotel managers, and personnel from hotels connected with Parsian International Hotels Company.

The reading of the Quran and the national hymn were aired during this function at the celebration hall and banquets of the Kuh-e Noor, Parsian Evin Hotel. The event was conducted at all Parsian Group hotels at the same time through video conference. At the start of the program, Abdul Ali, Marketing and Sales Manager of Parsian Hotels Company and Secretary of the ceremony, examines the hotels' 90-year history in the hospitality sector, refurbishing the ancient Ramsar Hotel in 1928 and founding and modernizing new hotels. Parsian has been presented. He presented the tagline of Parsian hotels' 23rd year of operation, smart hospitality. Engineer Miramini, CEO of Parsian Hotels Company, explained the reasons for choosing this slogan for Parsian's activities in the 23rd year during another part of the ceremony: attempting to use new technical knowledge, artificial intelligence and intelligent process management, and providing materials and facilities. Requirements, consumption methods, service delivery, revenue management, cost, information management, and marketing communications, as well as the usage of smart business platforms such as Parsa.

According to the CEO of the country's biggest chain of 4 and 5 star hotels, the identity and existence of Parsian hotels are dependent on honorable service to the people and adherence to Islamic and Iranian hospitality. He referred to the beginning of the 23rd year of the establishment of Parsian Hotels Company and the underappreciated dimensions of hospitality in hotels: for many international travelers, hospitality, intimacy, and friendly behavior of the host community is a critical component in

enhancing their travel experience. Hospitality is a social and valued characteristic in many nations. Engineer Miramini requested that the Parsian Hotels personnel show many instances and patterns of Islamic and Iranian hospitality. He highlighted, "Our partners may watch the expansion of their collections by using the potential of welcoming cultural aspects as an intangible asset of tourist development in the hotel chain." In light of the historic Corona virus epidemic and the harm it created in the tourist business, Parsian Hotels Company deemed it effective in carrying out the social obligations of this group linked with Parsian Tourism Holding and Recreation Centers. He cited Parsian Hotels' services in assisting health defenders and volunteer jihadists combating the virus and giving services to victims of natural catastrophes in the nation in 2020 and 2021, as well as the continued efforts of offering loyal aid in collaboration with donors. He saw these actions as a major success and one of the gifts of the Foundation of the Oppressed's revolutionary approach. Engineer Miramini said that Parsian hotels are open to criticism and recommendations in order to take this vast complex forward on the road of progress and perfection. Given Iran's rich cultural history, he challenged his creative and skilled colleagues around the nation to discover innovative methods to demonstrate this value in this sector. "Guests who remind us of the inadequacies of service and hospitality, our friends are on the route to improvement and greatness," remarked the CEO of Parsian Hotels Company. They should be recognized. Finally, the CEO of Parsian Hotels Company declared the 23rd year of the company's operation of 22 Parsian hotels in 13 locations throughout the nation as Parsian, the year of embarking on the road of intelligent change towards Islamic and Iranian hospitality. He said that the company's center of creativity and innovation is eager to receive new and innovative ideas and collaborate with creative and hardworking kids in a variety of relevant sectors. The employees of Parsian Hotels honored this day by conducting a celebration of the anniversary of the creation of Parsian Hotels Company in all 22 hotels.



Barter Trade Balances Trade Between Iran, Brazil

TEHRAN (IP) - Barter of Iran's oil products with agriculture products of Brazil balances trade between the two sides, the spokesman for Iran Parliament's Agriculture Commission said.

Ahad Azadikhah made the remarks after a meeting with Laudemar Gonçalves de Aguiar Neto, Brazil's ambassador to Tehran, in which the two sides stressed the need to strengthen economic relations.

The commission spokesman continued: "By exporting products such as urea fertilizer, petroleum products, petrochemicals and agricultural products such as pistachios, saffron and raisins, we can achieve a good trade balance."

Azadikhah also announced the presence of Iranian producers in an Expo in Brazil next year.

Brazil is the world's eighth-largest economy and Iran's most important economic partner in the Americas, with \$ 2033 billion in GDP and \$ 400 billion in foreign trade per year.

IORC Launches LPG Gas Recovery System From Exhaust Gases



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The projects of Isfahan Oil Refining Company are carried out with an approach towards observing environmental issues in the form of two projects for improving and optimizing the process and protecting the production capacity.

Manager of the LPG Gas Recovery System project of Isfahan Oil Refining Company (IORC) Mr. Omid Aqababaei said that the project is underway by the hardworking oil-industry experts in the company.

He said that all projects of the company with an environmental protection approach are carried out in the form of two projects of improving and optimizing the process (comprehensive project) and protecting the production capacity and said these refining projects are to be carried out with an estimated 329b rials plus 3.5m euros of credit and it is expected to be completed by February 2022.

He said these projects are underway and are aimed at improving environmental issues in accordance with euro 5 standards as well as boosting the safety of the units and converting heavy and low value products into light and very valuable products.

Aqababaei noted that the goal behind implementing the system is to recover LPG and hydrogen from the exhaust gases in the isomerization unit.

KSC, Exemplary Industrial Unit of Province



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of House of Industry and Mine of Khorasan Razavi Province announced the news that Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) once again has been chosen as the exemplary industrial unit of the province.

Gholamreza Nazparvar said that during the meeting for specialized assessment of the house for choosing the top and exemplary industrial units of the province which was held last week, KSC was chosen once again as the exemplary industrial unit of the province.

Reacting to this achievement, the CEO of the company Mr. Kasra Ghafoori felicitated this achievement and called it the outcome of the specialized assessment of all industrial units of the province.

Khorasan Steel Complex Company repeated last year's achievement as the top industrial unit of the province.

13 Killed by Security Forces in India's Northeast

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian security forces killed 13 civilians in the northeastern state of Nagaland after firing on a truck and later shooting at a crowd that gathered to protest the attack, police said Sunday.

Troops shot dead six laborers returning to their homes on Saturday afternoon in Mon district, near the Myanmar border, after setting up an ambush for insurgents they believed were operating in the area.

Family members and villagers later went looking for the missing men and confronted the troops after finding the bodies.

"This is where a confrontation happened between the two sides, and the security personnel fired, killing seven more people," Nagaland police officer Sandeep M. Tamgadge told AFP.



Indonesia Volcano Toll Rises

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - The death toll following the eruption of Indonesia's Semeru volcano has risen to 14, officials said, as rescuers searched villages blanketed in molten ash for survivors.

In a statement on Sunday, a spokesman for Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) said two of the 14 people killed by the eruption have been identified.

The spokesman, Abdul Muhari, said at least 98 people have been injured, including two pregnant women, while 902 people have been evacuated from the villages surrounding Semeru in the East Java Province.



Taliban Reject Claims of Summary Killings of Ex-Security Forces



KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's Taliban government on Sunday rejected condemnation by Western nations over dozens of alleged "summary killings" of former security force personnel documented by rights groups since the Islamists returned to power.

The U.S., other Western nations and allies on Saturday said they were "deeply concerned" by allegations by Human Rights Watch and others that point to "serious human rights abuses".

Alleged summary killings and enforced disappearances "contradict" an amnesty declared by the Taliban for former security force personnel after the Islamists defeated a Western-backed regime and retaken control of the country in mid-August, the State Department said.

The European Union, Australia, Britain, Japan and others also put their names to the statement.

But the Taliban's Interior Ministry on Sunday rejected both the Western rebuke and rights groups' allegations.

"These reports and claims are not based on evidences," spokesman Qari Sayed Khosti said in a video statement released by the Taliban. "We reject such claims."

"We have some cases where some former ANDSF members were killed but they have been killed because of personal rivalries and enmities," he said, referring to the now-defunct Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.

Many ex-regime security personnel "who had martyred hundreds of mujahideen and civilians are living peacefully" in the country on the basis of the general amnesty the Taliban granted, he added.

HRW on November 30 released a report that it says documents the summary execution or enforced disappearance of 47 former members of the ANDSF, other military personnel, police and intelligence agents "who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces" from mid-August through October.

The Taliban's return came some 20 years after they were driven out by US forces who toppled a government that earned outrage for its brutal treatment of women, failure to uphold human rights and harsh interpretation of Islam.

Today's Taliban leaders, keen to gain international respectability, have pledged their regime will be different.

But in its report HRW said Taliban leaders have directed surrendering security forces to register with authorities in order to be screened for ties to certain military or special forces units, and to receive a letter guaranteeing their safety.

"The Taliban have used these screenings to detain and summarily execute or forcibly disappear individuals within days of their registration, leaving their bodies for their relatives or communities to find," HRW said.

Clashes Erupt at Brussels Protest Against Covid Rules

BRUSSELS (AFP) - Belgian police fired water cannon on Sunday to disperse protesters opposed to compulsory health measures against the coronavirus pandemic.

Some 8,000 people marched through Brussels towards the headquarters of the European Union, chanting "Freedom!" and letting off fireworks.

The crowd was smaller than the 35,000 vaccine and lockdown skeptics who marched last month, and police were better prepared.

Protesters were blocked from reaching the roundabout outside the EU headquarters by a barbed wire barricade and a line of riot officers. As two drones and a helicopter circled overhead, they threw fireworks and beer cans. Police responded with water cannon and tear gas.

As the crowd dispersed into smaller groups around the European quarter, there were more clashes and some set fire to barricades of rubbish.

Several European countries have seen demonstrations in recent weeks as governments respond to a surge in covid cases with tighter restrictions.

In Brussels, the organizers hoped to match the November 21 demo, in which police seemed caught off guard and there were violent clashes.

The demonstrators oppose compulsory health measures - such as masks, lockdowns and vaccine passes - and some share conspiracy theories. Banners on Sunday compared the stigmatization of the non-vaccinated to the treatment of Jews forced to wear yellow stars in Nazi Germany.

"Covid = Organised Genocide," said one sign. "The QR code is a Swastika," declared another, referring to the EU Covid safe digital certificate.

Parents -- some of whom brought small children to the protest -- chanted their belief that the vaccine would make their toddlers sick.

Off duty firefighters in uniform, marched at the head of the protest as it wound its way through the city, to demand the right to refuse vaccination.



Three Wounded as Myanmar Soldiers Ram Car Into Protest

YANGON (AFP) - Myanmar soldiers wounded at least three people after ramming a car into a peaceful anti-coup rally in Yangon, eyewitnesses said.

The country has been in turmoil since February when the military seized power, triggering nationwide demonstrations which the junta sought to quell with violent crackdowns and mass arrests.

More than 10 months of military rule has seen some 1,300 killed rallying against the army but small, highly mobile protests still crop up.

The rally in Yangon was violently dispersed Sunday morning when a large car ploughed into it, according to a journalist there.

"They increased the speed when they got closer to the protesters -- it was like they drove into them," he said, declining to provide his name for security reasons.

He said a handful of people, some carrying banners in support of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, were hit and splayed on the ground as others fled the scene.

"Then the soldiers jumped out of the car and started shooting," he said.

One protester appeared to have been seriously wounded, said another person at the scene, and was taken with two others -- one of them a Myanmar journalist -- away in an ambulance.

Soldiers then started beating three people knocked over by the vehicle, a 26-year-old resident alleged.

"The soldiers then pointed their guns at us and ordered all the bystanders to leave, so we had to leave," the resident added.

State-run MRTV news reported that security forces "took action" on the protesters, though it made no mention of soldiers using a vehicle to collide with them.

It confirmed three people were injured -- with one sustaining serious wounds -- and 11 were arrested for "having a protest without asking for permission".

The junta has long justified its power takeover by alleging fraud in last year's elections, which Suu Kyi's party swept in an apparent landslide, and have vowed to hold fresh polls in 2023.

Gambian Opposition Rejects Election Results

BANJUL (Reuters) - Three opposition candidates have rejected the partial results of Gambia's election that show President Adama Barrow heading for a resounding victory, citing an unusual delay in tallying the votes.

Barrow had won about 54% of votes from 50 of 53 constituencies, leaving the West African nation of 2.5 million people on the verge of a result that was expected to draw a line under a difficult political past.

Saturday's vote was the first in 27 years without disgraced former President Yahya Jammeh, who lives in exile in Equatorial Guinea after refusing to accept defeat to Barrow in 2016.

Jammeh, whose 22-year rule was characterised by killings and torture of political opponents, had tried to persuade supporters to vote for an opposition coalition in telephoned speeches that were relayed to campaign rallies.

Official results suggested he had failed to dent Barrow's following, and representatives from all

opposition parties signed off on the tally sheets already read to the election commission on Sunday.

But late on Sunday Barrow's nearest rival, veteran politician Ousainou Darboe, and two other candidates, Mama Kandeh and Essa Mbye Faal, said they would not accept the results.

"We are concerned that there had been an inordinate delay in the announcement of results," their statement said. "A number of issues have been raised by our party agents and representatives at the polling stations."

The election was seen as a test of Gambia's democratic progress and its ability to leave the Jammeh era behind.

Barrow's first term was marked by the coronavirus pandemic, which damaged an economy that relies heavily on tourism, as well as exports of peanuts and fish.

Banjul was calm on Sunday night, albeit with a heavy police presence, especially at the election commission headquarters, where water cannon had been set up.



French Presidential Hopeful Promises Reconquest at Rally



VILLEPINTE (Dispatches) - French far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour promised a "reconquest" against decades of decline at his first political rally, as scuffles with anti-racism protesters broke out on its fringes.

"If I win this election, it won't be another rotation of power but a reconquest of the greatest country in the world," Zemmour said in a nearly an hour-and-a-half-long speech.

He said he was calling his party "Reconquest", a name that evokes the historic period known as the Reconquista, when Christian forces drove Muslim rulers from the Iberian peninsula.

With echoes of Donald Trump's first campaign for U.S. president, Zemmour promised to slash immigration and taxes to cheers from flag-waving supporters that organisers put at 15,000. A Reuters count put their number at around 10,000.

Zemmour supporters threw punches and chairs at several protesters wearing anti-racism T-shirts trying to stand on chairs as Zemmour gave his first speech since declaring his candidacy. Earlier police arrested several dozen anti-Zemmour protesters and chased away others near the giant convention hall north of Paris. Hundreds of protesters also marched in Paris.

The former journalist and commentator ended weeks of speculation about a run for the presidency on Tuesday, declaring his candidacy in an online video.

Zemmour, who has been convicted for inciting racial hatred, is the main challenger to long-time far-right figure Marine Le Pen for a place in a second run-off round of next April's election, most likely against President Emmanuel Macron.

Known for provocative statements against Islam and immigration, he has won support away from both Le Pen's voter base but also the mainstream conservative right.

He said he aimed to bring immigration to zero if elected and cut taxes for the working class and companies, while abolishing inheritance tax on family businesses. He also said he would pull France out of the integrated military command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.



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marble fl
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Pasdaran Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Niavaran Apts (\$1500) 2bdrs, S/p (\$1900) 3bdrs, S/p (\$2600) 4bdrs, S/p	Elahieh Apts (\$1700) 2bdrs, F.F (\$2000) 3bdrs, F.F (\$2400) 4bdrs, F.F	Sa'adat abad Apts (\$1200) 3bdrs, S/p, F.F (\$1500) 3bdrs, S/p, F.F (\$2000) 4bdrs, S/p, F.F
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Vietnam to Pay Attention to Monetary Policy

HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam will pay more attention to its monetary policy as it is not only a domestic matter but the a concern for the country's big trade partners, a central bank deputy governor said, days after the U.S. Treasury's semi-annual currency report.

The U.S. Treasury report on Friday said that Vietnam exceeded its trade surplus, current account and foreign exchange intervention thresholds, but was "satisfied with progress made by Vietnam to date" on addressing exchange-rate issues.

Speaking at an economic forum, Pham Thanh Ha, deputy central bank governor, said the bank had taken the issues seriously and its monetary policy towards them had been implemented effectively.



India, Sri Lanka Finalize Four-Point Package for Economic Cooperation

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India and Sri Lanka have framed a four-point package, including a line of credit to cover the import of food and medicines and a currency swap arrangement, to deepen economic cooperation and to help the island nation cope with economic problems.

The package was finalized during two meetings that visiting Sri Lankan finance minister Basil Rajapaksa had with his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman and external affairs minister S Jaishankar last week.

This was Rajapaksa's first overseas visit since he assumed office in July.

The two sides discussed four pillars for short and medium-term cooperation, according to a statement issued by the Sri Lankan high commission at the conclusion of Rajapaksa's visit on Thursday.

They include a food and health security package on an urgent basis that envisages the extension of a line of credit by India to cover the import of food, medicines and other essential items by Sri Lanka, an energy security package that will include a line of credit to cover the import of fuel from India, and the early modernisation of Trincomalee Tank Farm.

The package also includes an offer of a currency swap to help Sri Lanka address the current balance of payment issues, and facilitating Indian investments in different sectors in Sri Lanka to contribute to growth and expand employment, the statement said.

The two sides further agreed that modalities to realise this package would be "finalised early, within a mutually agreed timeline", the statement said.

Rajapaksa and Sitharaman and Jaishankar "agreed to open direct lines of communication" and to be in direct and regular contact with each other to coordinate on this initiative.

People familiar with developments said on condition of anonymity that it was significant that both Sitharaman and Jaishankar participated in the two rounds of discussions with Rajapaksa. They said this reflected the importance India attaches to the relationship with Sri Lanka.

The people said Sri Lanka's request for a \$1 billion bilateral currency swap, first made in 2020, did not figure in the latest discussions. The currency swap offered to Sri Lanka is expected to be made under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) facility and would be worth \$400 million.

Ties between New Delhi and Colombo were hit earlier this year when Sri Lanka scrapped a 2019 deal with India and Japan to operate the East Container Terminal at the Colombo port, angering both countries.

In October, state-owned Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) inked a deal with India's Adani Group to develop and run the Colombo port's West Container Terminal.

Adani Group and its local partner John Keells Holdings will jointly have an 85% stake in the West Container Terminal, giving India a much-needed strategic presence at the Colombo port, where almost 70% of operations involve shipments bound for India.

Rajapaksa, who visited India at the invitation of Sitharaman, also had bilateral discussions with Jaishankar. These discussions focused on a range of issues of mutual importance, with particular attention on economic cooperation. Rajapaksa also met petroleum minister Hardeep Singh Puri and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

Goldman Sachs Cuts U.S. GDP Growth Forecast

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Goldman Sachs cut its outlook for US economic growth to 3.8 per cent for 2022, citing risks and uncertainty around the emergence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Goldman economist Joseph Briggs said in a note that the Omicron variant could slow economic reopening, but the firm expects "only a modest drag" on service spending.

The firm now sees 2022 gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 3.8 per cent, down from 4.2 per cent previously on a full year basis, and Q4/Q4 growth of 2.9 per cent, down from 3.3 per cent before, Briggs said.

"While many questions remain unanswered, we now think a moderate downside scenario where the virus spreads more quickly but immunity against severe disease is only slightly weakened is most likely," he said.

Worker shortages could last longer if people do not feel comfortable returning to work due to the variant, according to the note.

Goldman pointed the spread of the virus could worsen supply shortages should other countries implement tighter restrictions, but increase in vaccination rates among foreign trade partners would prevent severe disruptions.

Goldman Sachs' U.S. forecast comes after the International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Friday that the lender was likely to lower its global economic growth estimates due to the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus.



Turkey to Soon Ensure Stability in Lira, Prices

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey will soon tame its current price movements and currency fluctuations to a reasonable and stable line, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, again reaffirming his backing for low interest rates.

Erdoğan has repeatedly endorsed an economic model based on lower interest rates over the last two weeks, and the government, regulators and banking associations have all embraced the new policy direction.

"God willing, it will not take too long before all fluctuations in prices and forex rates stabilize," Erdoğan told an audience in the southeastern province of Siirt.

"Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said low interest rates yesterday, says low interest rates today and will say low interest rates tomorrow," the president said. "I will never compromise on this because interest rates are a malady that makes the rich even richer and the poor even poorer."

The president and other government officials have stressed that while there may be price pain for a while, the monetary stimulus should eventually boost exports, credit, jobs and economic growth. He has been reiterating a view that high borrowing costs cause inflation.

Erdoğan's remarks come amid high volatility in exchange rates after the country's central bank slashed its benchmark policy rate by 400 basis points to 15% from 19% since September. It is widely expected to lower it again this month. On the other hand, inflation reached 21.3% in November, a three-year high.

On Tuesday, the lira touched a record low of 14 to the United States dollar and ended Friday at 13.7. The high volatility triggered direct central bank intervention, selling dollars.

The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) last week intervened in the foreign exchange market twice due to "unhealthy price formations" in exchange rates.

Erdoğan has been backing a view that high borrowing costs "destroy" domestic production and make structural inflation permanent by increasing production costs. "We will always be

there for producers and employers with low interest rates. We're starting to enforce precautions safeguarding workers against inflation," he said.

He said unspecific foreign players, as well as "greedy" businesses that stockpile more goods than needed, are partly to blame for some sharp price spikes.

Touching on next year's minimum wage, which is set to be determined this month, he stressed, "we will relieve our low-income citizens a little more by setting the minimum wage at a level that will compensate for losses."

OECD Urges Japan to Keep Fiscal, Monetary Support for Economy



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan must maintain its expansive fiscal policy until its economic recovery from the pandemic is on track and not dial back its ultra-loose monetary policy too soon, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said.

The coronavirus pandemic hit the economy hard, and its recovery has been relatively modest but growth is on course to regain momentum, the OECD said in its Japan economic survey, which it published for the first time since April 2019.

If the Bank of Japan's (BOJ) monetary policy were to succeed in bringing inflation to its 2% target, it would likely lead to higher interest rates and therefore trigger a need for fiscal consolidation, the OECD said in its survey.

"Inflation should gradually pick up as the economy begins to emerge from the pandemic and spare capacity shrinks," it said, adding that supply disruptions and rising prices elsewhere in the world could pass through to lift domestic inflation.

"It is appropriate that monetary policy accommodation is not withdrawn prematurely," the organisation added.

Fiscal policy should continue to support the economy in the near term, the OECD said in the survey. Japan's debt has grown to more than twice the size of its gross domestic product (GDP), OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said.

"It is important to address this debt-to-GDP ratio, which really is too high," Cormann told reporters during an online news conference from Paris. The best way for reducing that ratio is by strengthening the growth of the economy, he added.

Interest payments on public debt have been kept low in part due to the BOJ's monetary and yield curve control policies, which have helped enable the government to borrow without risking higher or volatile interest rates, the survey said.

Japan unveiled a record \$490 billion spending package last month as it seeks to speed up its economic recovery, going against a global trend towards reversing crisis-mode stimulus measures. "It's going to be very important that the design and implementation of the stimulus package will be such that Japan really can maximize the beneficial impact," Cormann said.

IMF Likely to Lower Its Global Economic Growth Estimates

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund is likely to lower its global economic growth estimates due to the new omicron variant of the coronavirus, the global lender's chief said at the Reuters Next conference on Friday in another sign of the turmoil unleashed by the ever-changing pandemic.

Omicron has spread rapidly to at least 40 countries since it was first reported in South Africa last week, officials say, and many governments have tightened travel rules to try to keep it out.

"A new variant that may spread very rapidly can dent confidence, and in that sense, we are likely to see some downgrades of our October projections for global growth," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told the conference.

Much remains unknown about omicron. Researchers said it could have picked up genetic material from another virus, perhaps one that causes the common cold, which would allow it to more easily evade human immune system defenses.

Georgieva said the fund is also looking at all of its research processes in order to ensure its data integrity in the wake of a data-rigging scandal at the World Bank.

"Is there something more that can be done, and we are looking at all the processes — are they sufficiently up to date with what others are doing?" Georgieva said.

Trump's Social Media Venture Has Raised \$1b

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump's new social media venture said it had entered into agreements to raise about \$1 billion from a group of unidentified investors as it prepares to float in the U.S. stock market.

The capital raise, details of which were first reported by Reuters on Wednesday, underscored the former U.S. president's ability to attract strong financial backing thanks to his personal and political brand. He is working to launch a social media app called TRUTH Social that is at least several weeks away.

Digital World Acquisition Corp, the blank-check acquisition firm that will take Trump Media & Technology Group Corp public by listing it in New York, said it will provide up to \$293 million to the partnership with Trump's media venture, taking the total proceeds to about \$1.25 billion.

The \$1 billion will be raised through a private investment in public equity (PIPE) transaction from "a diverse group of institutional investors," Trump Media and Digital World said in a statement. They did not respond to requests to name the investors.

Trump Media inked its deal with Digital World to go public in October at a valuation of \$875 million, including debt. The social media venture is now valued at almost \$4 billion based on the price of Digital World shares at the end of trading on Friday. Trump supporters and day traders snapped up the stock.

Many Wall Street firms such as mutual funds and private equity firms snubbed the opportunity to invest in the PIPE. Among those investors who participated were hedge funds, family offices and high net-worth individuals, Reuters reported on Wednesday. Family offices manage the wealth of the very rich and their kin.

Some Wall Street investors are reluctant to associate with Trump. He was banned from top social media platforms after the Jan. 6 attack by his supporters on the U.S. Capitol amid concerns he would inspire further violence. The Capitol attack was based on unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud in last year's presidential election.

"As our balance sheet expands, Trump Media & Technology Group will be in a stronger position to fight back against the tyranny of Big Tech," Trump said in a statement on Saturday.

The deal also faces regulatory risk. U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren asked Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Gary Gensler last month to investigate the planned merger for potential violations of securities laws around disclosure. The SEC has declined to comment on whether it plans any action.

Iran, China Hold Workshop on Tax-Insurance Law

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The workshop on tax and insurance regulation between Iran and China was held in the presence of over 50 members of the Iran-China chamber of commerce in Shanghai.

During the event, the Chinese financial and tax expert elaborated on the latest regulations. Participants discussed double taxation regulations between Iran and China.

They also raised questions on personnel contracts in Iranian and Chinese contracts.



With Billions in New Deals, Rafale Fighter Makes a Comeback

PARIS (Dispatches) - The sale of 80 Rafale fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates was not only deemed “historic”, but it also seemed to confirm the continuing commercial success of the French fighter, a twin-jet aircraft able to operate from either land or an aircraft carrier.

A December 3 agreement for France to sell 80 Rafale fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was hailed as “historic” by French Minister of Defence Florence Parly. The CEO of Rafale manufacturer Dassault Aviation, Éric Trappier, also proclaimed his delight at the deal, which he described as the “most important contract ever obtained by the French military aeronautics industry”. Trappier was understandably euphoric as the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed ben Zayed al-Nahyane, signed the €16 billion agreement (including €2 billion for weapons), a record for the French aircraft manufacturer.

For Dassault – and also for Thales (the company that supplies all the Rafale’s internal electrical systems), Safran (which provides the engines) and several hundred other subcontractors – the deal means guaranteed business for more than six years. It takes at least one month to manufacture a Rafale.

The sale – which is also good economic news for French President Emmanuel Macron, just over four months before the next presidential election – further reinforces the Rafale’s reputation as the “phoenix” of military aviation.

During its more than 25 years of existence, the jet has faced challenges and emerged in different variations. Presented as one of the most advanced fighters at its inception, the Rafale has struggled to sell abroad.

Negotiations for the sale of Rafale fighters have been dragging on for more than a decade, with Abu Dhabi publicly rebuffing France’s offer to supply 60 planes in 2011 as “uncompetitive and unworkable”.

Until 2015, Dassault Aviation was fighting an uphill battle – and it was not for lack of trying. Whether in Brazil, India or in the UAE (negotiations had been going on with Abu Dhabi since 2008), the Rafale was deemed too expensive: Its selling price was about €100 million, not to mention its maintenance costs, which were “among the highest on the market”, according to a report published by the University of Toulon in 2011. Its competitors, such as the multinational Eurofighter, the Swedish Gripen fighters and American jets, often sell for less than €100 million.

In fact, the French aircraft was locked in a vicious circle: Dassault Aviation needed more orders before economies of scale would allow it to sell at a lower price, but countries were reluctant to commit to purchasing because of the price. And the jet’s sales to the French military alone would never be large enough.

Eventually the Rafale demonstrated its usefulness in Libya and Afghanistan as the first decade of the 2000s came to a close, arousing more international interest. Its performance in battle conditions was the tipping point, according to La Tribune business daily.

In 2015 Egypt became the first Rafale buyer outside of the French military, purchasing some 20 jets. Other contracts followed – with India, Qatar, Greece and Croatia – until the UAE this week became the sixth member of the club of Rafale’s foreign customers.

This latest contract means more Rafale jets are now sold abroad than in France (236 international sales versus 192 domestic).

But the renaissance of the Rafale – once described as a “cursed aircraft” and now



considered a success story – is not so impressive when viewed in the context of the broader international arms market, said Alexandre Vautravers, arms expert and editor of the Swiss Military Review (RMS). “This achievement still remains far below what the direct competition – starting with the American F-35 made by Lockheed Martin – announced at the same time,” he told FRANCE 24.

Lockheed Martin has already sold nearly 1,000 F-35s worldwide, not counting orders from the US Army itself. And more orders mean the US manufacturer can do what Dassault Aviation cannot: lower its price. The F-35A model costs less than \$80 million (€70 million).

This leaves the Rafale in an uncomfortable position. The F-35 is cheaper, newer (it has been in service for only 15 years) and “40% more efficient, according to the estimates of the Swiss authorities”, explained Vautravers.

Both aircraft occupy the same market niche – multi-purpose or “omni-purpose” fighter jets, to use official Dassault Aviation jargon. During a single mission they are capable of establishing air superiority – the traditional mission of fighter jets – as well as carrying out bombing and ground-support operations.

But the F-35 is also a stealth fighter jet, which is not the case with the Rafale, and has a greater range.

The main advantage of the French aircraft is strategic.

“The biggest selling point for the Rafale jet is that it bypasses any possible American embargo,” said Vautravers. It is better not to be solely dependent on the US for defense equipment in case Washington imposes economic sanctions. The “Rafale – like Russian systems – allow people to diversify”, he said.

Overall, Rafales are selling better now “because there is a growing market”, Vautravers said. The real test of how to evaluate how well the French aircraft is doing in a competitive market is to look at the countries where Dassault has found new buyers.

Most Rafale sales have been made “in countries that had already bought French aircraft”, he said. Egypt, Greece and the UAE all signed up to renew their French fleets. Even India already had French fighter planes. France has not managed to attract any new customers, only maintained old ones.

Ongoing negotiations to sell 36 French planes to Indonesia are therefore key for Dassault, as a deal would finally bring France a brand new client.

Swiss Watchdog Seeks More Tools to Go After Bad Bankers



ZURICH (Dispatches) - The chairperson of Switzerland’s financial watchdog has called for more power to punish wayward bankers after a string of scandals tarnished the sector’s international reputation.

Marlene Amstad, head of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority’s (FINMA) board of directors, told the SonntagsZeitung paper the agency would welcome new tools to hold bankers accountable for the mistakes they make.

While FINMA can now remove bankers who make grave errors, it lacks the kind of broader toolkit that Britain, for example, has with its Senior Manager Regime, she said in the interview.

“We cannot introduce such instruments ourselves, the legislature has to do that. Currently, there are political initiatives that address the need for action in this regard. We are interested in having as complete a toolbox as possible and are fundamentally open to new, effective instruments,” she said.

Exasperation with Credit Suisse in particular is prompting Switzerland to rethink a system in which top bankers have been largely untouchable, Reuters reported in May.

Credit Suisse’s heavy losses from the collapse of family office Archegos and the decimation of billions of client investments backed by insolvent British financier Greensill angered regulators and triggered a rare discussion among lawmakers about fining bankers.

On other subjects, Amstad said risks from the mortgage market had risen as red-hot property prices diverged from economic fundamentals, but she said it was not up to FINMA to decide whether to reimpose the anti-cyclical capital buffers that the government has suspended amid the pandemic.

“What we can do is demand risk surcharges from individual banks if a bank takes too great a risk when granting mortgages. We use this instrument regularly, including recently,” she said without giving further details.

Indian Ocean Region Hit by COVID-19, U.S. Afghan Pullout

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The pull-out of United States forces from Afghanistan and the Coronavirus pandemic are the two developments that have posed the biggest recent challenges for countries in the Indian Ocean, said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

He was speaking at a conference in Abu Dhabi where Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa also made a strong plea for help on behalf of debt ridden countries in the region most affected by the pandemic.

“The American withdrawal from Afghanistan leaves both the immediate and extended region grappling with serious concerns about terrorism, radicalism, instability, narco-trafficking and governance practices. Given proximity and sociology, we are all affected one way or the other,” said Mr. Jaishankar, addressing the Indian Ocean Conference, organized by the Delhi-based India Foundation, and attended by leaders and delegates ranging from the Gulf region to the Pacific Islands.

“The consequences of China’s growing capabilities are particularly profound because of the extrapolation of its domestic seamlessness to the world outside... Separately, we have also seen a sharpening of tensions on territorial issues across the breadth of Asia. Agreements and understandings of yesteryears now seem to have some question marks,” he added.

Mr. Jaishankar also spoke about a shift in the U.S.’s strategic power posture and new-found “caution” in the region along with the rise of China and a number of territorial disputes in Asia as global trends of the most concern. Without mentioning the 20-month old military standoff between the PLA and Indian army after Chinese transgressions at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, Mr. Jaishankar said there is a need to move towards a “multipolar Asia” in a “plurilateral world”.

Speaking about the rise of extremism and terrorism within the region, Mr. Rajapaksa said the ‘Easter bombings’ by ISIS-inspired terrorists in Sri Lanka in April 2019 had shown that terrorism cannot be contained in any one area and it “spreads from nation to nation with ease” unless curbed. He proposed a regional mechanism in the Indian Ocean countries to share intelligence and cooperate more on fighting terrorism.

In their speeches, both the Vice-President of Maldives Faisal Naseem and Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa made a point of mentioning the impact of COVID on small islands like theirs, as well as the need for more sustainable fishing practices for their economies.

North-South Corridor Important for Iran, Russia

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Chairman of Russian-Iranian Business Council (RIDS) Vladimir Obydenov said on Monday that the north-south corridor constituted the backbone of the EAEU and Iran development and was of vital significance for Tehran and Moscow.

Obydenov said that the north-south corridor is the shortest route from Europe to South and Southeast Asia, passing through Russia and Iran.

Instability in the Middle East and the insecurity in marine routes have made the north-south corridor a potential alternative for the Suez Canal, the Russian official said.

The corridor is a railroad that begins from China and passes through India, Pakistan, and Iran, Obydenov said, adding that but it is interrupted in Iran’s Rasht city,

awaiting the construction of the 170km Rasht-Astara railway to be connected to Finland and East Europe.

He said that Iran’s potential membership in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) could elevate business transactions between Iran and the EAEU countries.

The official also touched on Iran’s accession to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), saying that this could have a positive effect on Iran-Russia relations, warning that the opportunity, however, wasn’t an elixir of all problems and shouldn’t be considered a goal.

He further explained that SCO membership was an instrument to reach the goal which is diversification of development in Iran and Iranians should pursue other development plans while awaiting finalization of SCO membership.

No Interim Agreement...

FROM PAGE 1

He also reacted to the recent remarks of the Zionist regime’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett about Iran’s nuclear program, saying, “The Zionist regime opposes any dialogue in the region, and it is constantly seeking to create artificial issues in international affairs.”

Regarding the exact date of the next round of the Vienna talks on the removal of sanctions imposed on Iran, the diplomat said, “The next round of talks will begin this week and the exact date will be finalized in a telephone conversation between Bagheri and Mora.”

Iran has entered talks with ‘serious will’ for sanction removal, he added, saying, “We are not in a hurry and we do not allow anyone to waste our time.”

In reaction to French President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to the region, the FM spokesperson said, “We expect countries like France to act more responsibly.

The advanced weapons of European countries, including France, which are selling to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf are the basis of the tensions we are witnessing in the region.”

Imports of Basic Goods...

FROM PAGE 1

The Islamic Republic imported 26.5 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$32 billion in the first eight months of the present year, with a 38-percent growth in value and a 21-percent rise in weight year on year.

The United Arab Emirates was the top exporter to Iran in the said period, followed by China, Turkey, Germany, and Switzerland, he stated.

Mir-Ashrafi has previously announced that the value of Iran’s non-oil trade stood at \$73 billion in the past Iranian calendar year.

He further named Iran’s top sources of non-oil imports in the said time, as China with exporting \$9.7 billion worth of products to the Islamic Republic, the UAE with \$9.6 billion, Turkey with \$4.3 billion, India with \$2.1 billion, and Germany with \$1.8 billion, respectively, and mentioned corn, cellphone, rice, oil meal, and oilseeds, wheat, and raw oil as the major imported items.

Iran Minerals...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the report, Iran imported \$1.96 billion worth of mining and mineral products from March 21 to Oct. 22, showing an 11 percent hike as compared to the last year’s corresponding period.

Iran has 81 various types of mining and mineral products which accounts for 0.8 percent of the world’s total reserves. In addition, the country’s reserves of copper mine ore stand at 2.6 billion tons which accounts for 0.4 percent of the world’s total copper reserves.

There Is Room...

FROM PAGE 1

“Western parties could not object to the texts from legal perspective or could not describe them as contrary to #JCPOA. 1st, they were not even willing to grant privileges authorized by JCPOA. 2nd, they were not willing to re-discuss the issues in the drafts”, the official tweeted.

“We consider our proposals as drafts subject to negotiation and we have also encouraged the other parties to put their clear texts and proposals on the table based on common principles and within the framework of the #JCPOA”, the MFA official stressed.

The seventh round of talks on sanctions removal and reviving the JCPOA began on November 29 in the Austrian capital.

According to Mikhail Ulyanov, the talks on the nuclear deal with Iran in Vienna will resume this week after the participants carry out consultations in their respective capitals.

During the talks, Iran provided two documents on the removal of illegal US sanctions and Iran’s nuclear activities to the other signatories to the JCPOA.

Kongwatmai Secures First Asian Tour Win

PHUKET (Dispatches) - Thailand's Phachara Kongwatmai took home his first Asian Tour victory on Sunday, claiming the \$1 million Laguna Phuket Championship after fending off two fellow countrymen and South Korea's Bi-o Kim by a single shot. Phachara's 10-under par total of 270 came after he holed a 12-foot par putt on the 18th, eking out a win with Kim, Panuphol Pittayarat and Denwit Boriboonsub hot on his heels. "I feel very happy and very excited for this year... (I've) been waiting for about six years," he said.

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Van Tonder Wins South African Open

SUN CITY (Dispatches) - Daniel van Tonder sunk a birdie putt on the last hole to win the South African Open on Sunday as he held off a late charge from home compatriot Oliver Bekker. The 30-year-old Van Tonder made eight birdies in a final- round 65 to finish 16 under par with a total of 272, one shot ahead of Bekker. Bekker, the halfway leader at the Gary Player Country Club, finished with a round of 66, fighting back into contention over the closing holes before Van Tonder's victory putt ended his hopes of a playoff.

Hamilton Wins 3rd Straight In Chaotic Saudi Arabian Race

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Lewis Hamilton passed Max Verstappen with six laps remaining Sunday to win the chaotic inaugural Saudi Arabian Grand Prix and pull even on points with his rival as Formula One's thrilling championship race heads into the title-deciding finale.

The race on the street circuit under the lights on the 30-kilometer (18.6-mile) coastal resort area in Jeddah was marred by three standing starts, a pair of restarts, multiple safety cars and an intense back-and-forth between the title contenders.

Red Bull was allowed to negotiate a penalty for Verstappen, Mercedes head Toto Wolff slammed his headset in rage, and Hamilton drove into the back of his title rival before ultimately passing Verstappen for the win with six laps remaining.

"Lewis, that has got to be the craziest race I can remember," Hamilton's engineer radioed after he crossed the finish line.

"Great job, guys, great job!" Hamilton replied. "That's more like it, let's keep pushing!"

A dejected Verstappen, who has seen his hold on the title race evaporate over the last three races, was dejected.

"It is what it is," the Dutchman said. "I tried, at least."

Verstappen was penalized for going off course on the second restart, was later told to yield position to Hamilton, but Hamilton ran into the back of his Red Bull to damage the front wing on his Mercedes. The two then went back and forth over the closing sequence.

But once the seven-time world champion passed Verstappen for good, Hamilton controlled the finish and won for the third consecutive race. The British driver has eight wins on the season and has now pulled into a tie with Verstappen in the standings.

The championship will be decided next Sunday in the finale in Abu Dhabi.

Hamilton is the four-time defending F1 champion and seeking an eighth title to break the all-time record he shares with Michael Schumacher. The 24-year-old Verstappen is



seeking his first championship and had dominated the season for Red Bull until this late three-race charge by Mercedes and Hamilton.

Ahead of next weekend's Abu Dhabi GP, Verstappen leads Hamilton on races won, having claimed nine victories to the Briton's eight.

"That was incredibly tough, I tried to be as sensible and as tough as I could," seven-time champion Hamilton said after Sunday's race.

"With all my experience, keeping on track and staying clean... We persevered as a team, I'm really proud of everybody."

Hamilton also addressed the biggest incident of the race, when Verstappen was ordered to let Hamilton past but braked abruptly and caused the Briton to hit the back of the Red Bull.

"I didn't understand why he hit the breaks heavily, I ran into the back of him, then he moved on," Hamilton said. "I didn't understand, I got a message afterwards, it was confusing.

"They've got some raw pace, they've been so quick, it's really hard.

"We've done an amazing job, it's been an amazing event."

Verstappen eventually led Hamilton past him but immediately reclaimed the leader. Hamilton, however, got out in front once more and stayed there to secure the victory.



LAKE LOUISE (Dispatches) - Italy's Sofia Goggia snatched a World Cup super-G victory from Lara Gut-Behrami to become the first skier to sweep all three Lake Louise races since U.S. speed great Lindsey Vonn.

Goggia trailed Gut-Behrami's leading time at every interval until she flashed across the finish line in 1min 18.28sec -- 11-hundredths of a second ahead of the Swiss.

Austrian Mirjam Puchner was third, 44-hundredths behind the winner.

The victory capped a dominant week in the Colorado Rockies for Goggia, who won the first downhill of the season on Friday by a staggering 1.47sec and cruised to victory in the second downhill on Saturday with a more conservative display in cloudy, snowy conditions.

Her two downhill victories gave her a streak of six wins in six downhill starts, the longest since Vonn won six in a row leading up to the 2010 Olympics. She matched Vonn's feat of a Lake Louise sweep, which the American achieved in 2011, 2012 and 2015.

Saint-Etienne

Sack Puel After Rennes Thrashing

PARIS (Dispatches) - Claude Puel became the first Ligue 1 coach to be dismissed this season after bottom side Saint-Etienne suffered a 5-0 loss at home to Rennes on Sunday.

The former Monaco, Lyon and Leicester City boss paid the price for winning just two of 17 matches this term, leaving Saint-Etienne behind Metz on goal difference at the foot of the table.

Saint-Etienne released a statement that said Puel had been stood down from his position in charge of the first team until further notice. He will meet with club management on Monday.

It effectively brings an end to Puel's two-year spell in charge at a club that was put up for sale in April.

Rennes heaped more misery on Saint-Etienne as Martin Terrier scored his first career hat-trick. A comical own goal by Yvann Macon and late strike by 17-year-old Lesley Ugochukwu completed the rout.

"That really hurts," Saint-Etienne midfielder Zaydou Youssouf told Prime Video.

"It is a disaster, to lose 5-0 at home is unacceptable, we have no right to lose like that.

"We have to show a different side to ourselves because that was rubbish."

Rennes reclaimed second place as they rebounded convincingly from a midweek loss to Lille -- the only defeat in their past 15 matches in all competitions -- but still trail leaders Paris Saint-Germain by 11 points.

Bruno Genesio's team face a near impossible task of catching PSG, although the Qatar-owned club are hardly playing like a side filled with superstars.

Freiburg Celebrate Historic Win in Moenchengladbach

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Moenchengladbach coach Adi Huetter was under mounting pressure Sunday after his side slumped to a historic 6-0 humiliation at home to Freiburg, leaving them just three places above the Bundesliga drop zone.

Freiburg scored all six goals in an incredible first half as they rampaged to their highest ever Bundesliga win against a shellshocked Gladbach side.



after a heated and emotional game. We will stand by him," Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc told AFP-subsiary SID.

Bellingham risks being punished by the German Football Federation (DFB) after claiming costly decisions by referee Felix Zwayer were to be expected given he was implicated in the worst match-fixing scandal in German history.

The 18-year-old England international was furious that Zwayer had not awarded a

Dortmund Defend Bellingham Amid Possible Sanctions

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund said Sunday they would stand by England midfielder Jude Bellingham, who faces potential sanctions and even legal consequences after he made explosive comments about the referee after his side's 3-2 defeat to Bayern Munich on Saturday.

"The boy is 18 years old and was speaking after a heated and emotional game. We will stand by him," Dortmund sporting director

Michael Zorc told AFP-subsiary SID.

Bellingham risks being punished by the German Football Federation (DFB) after

claiming costly decisions by referee Felix Zwayer were to be expected given he was

implicated in the worst match-fixing scandal in German history.

The 18-year-old England international was furious that Zwayer had not awarded a

Fred Gives Rangnick Reign at Man Utd Lift Off

LONDON (Dispatches) - Ralf Rangnick's reign at Manchester United got off to a winning start thanks to a stunning strike from the much-maligned Fred to beat Crystal Palace 1-0 at Old Trafford on Sunday.

A bright start from the Red Devils fizzled out without reward and the German looked like he might have to settle for a disappointing draw in his first match since taking charge until the end of the season.

But Fred, who had been a target for much of the criticism towards the end of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's time as manager, produced a moment of magic with a curling effort on his weaker right foot 13 minutes from time to snatch a crucial victory.

United move back to within three points of the top four and up to sixth in the Premier League table.

There were no immediate changes from Rangnick in the line-up as he named an unchanged side from Thursday's 3-2 win over Arsenal.

But there was an instant change in approach as United pressed Palace into coughing up possession deep inside their own half twice in the first five minutes.

However, there was a lack of precision to match United's intensity.

Cristiano Ronaldo took his tally of goals for club and country to 801 with a double in midweek, but his long wait to net from a free-kick goes on as his effort from the edge of the box did not dip in time.

Ronaldo also had a shot blocked by Marc Guehi after deciding against hitting Bruno Fernandes' dinked pass first time.

United's best chance of the first 45 minutes fell to Fred, but his goalbound effort was bravely diverted behind by James Tomkins.

Fernandes finally tested Vicente Guaita from Ronaldo's knockdown before Diogo Dalot fired wastefully over on his weaker left foot with the last kick of the first half.

However, United's early enthusiasm to impress their new boss drained away as the second half performance more closely resembled the final days of Solskjaer's reign.

Palace should have gone in front 15 minutes from time when Jordan Ayew somehow turned Tomkins' header back across goal and beyond the reach of Guehi at the back post.



Medvedev Leads Russia to Third Davis Cup Title

MADRID (Dispatches) - Russia took an unassailable 2-0 lead over Croatia in the Davis Cup final in Madrid on Sunday to secure their third title and first in 15 years, as Daniil Medvedev outlasted Croatian Marin Cilic 7-6(7) 6-2.

Reigning U.S. Open champion Medvedev had to produce his best tennis to survive a tense first set as a confident Cilic sent across nine forehand winners and won nearly three-quarters of his service points.

The awed crowd inside Madrid Arena was reduced to pin-drop silence as the 1.98-metre titans went into a tiebreak, where Medvedev relied on his backhand to prevail despite an ill-timed double fault.

Cilic showed signs of fatigue in the second set as the world number two broke his serve in the fourth game before running away with the momentum, dropping just one of his first-serve points.

"I'm more happy for the team than for myself," Medvedev said. "I'm just happy to be part of this team and be able to bring the points."

Medvedev got a standing ovation from the crowd and made peace with the Spanish fans following a week of animosity after Russia eliminated Spain in the group stage of the Davis Finals.

"I loved the atmosphere. It was a really amazing two weeks because it's never easy to come here in the end of the season and compete. For sure it was the best two weeks of my career," Medvedev said.

Earlier world number five Andrey Rublev beat Borna Gojo 6-4 7-6(5) to give the Russian Federation a 1-0 lead.

Russia's third title equals the Czech Republic and Germany in seventh place on the all-time list of Davis Cup winners.

World number 279 Gojo entered the match as the big surprise of the tournament and a favourite of the Spanish crowd.

He was unbeaten in the finals with three victories over world number 61 Alexei Popyrin of Australia, number 27 Lorenzo Sonego of Italy, and 33rd-ranked Serbian Dusan Lajovic.

But Rublev played a near-flawless match, overpowering Gojo with strong serving to keep the Croatian on the back foot.

