

Minister of Communications and Information Technology Says That Iran Will Have “Good News” About Its Launch of Satellites Before the End of the Current Persian Year in March 2022

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 131,033 With 41 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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Tehran Warns of Possible Israeli Acts of Mischief to Derail Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian security official has warned about “acts of mischief” by Israel against Iran amid “relatively successful” negotiations going on between the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal aimed at removing sanctions in Tehran.

“Some unevaluated news, which we will take into consideration in a separate opportunity, suggests that the Zionist regime is examining to conduct acts of mischief against the Islamic Republic,” the informed official told Iran’s Nour news agency.

“The probability of this occurrence is not far from expected given the regime’s acts of mischief in the past meant to damage the talks between Iran and other JCPOA members,” he added, referring to reports about an order by Israeli minister of military affairs, Benny Gantz, to the army to prepare for the possibility of a military strike on Iran.

Iran and the P4+1 group of countries that comprises the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany have held several rounds of talks in the Austrian capital, Vienna. The negotiations are aimed at removing the sanctions that the United States reimposed against Tehran in 2018 after leaving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). **See Page 7**

Iran Exports to Europe Up Dramatically in October



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran’s exports to the European Union reached above 103 million euros in October, the highest since the end of 2018.

The latest figures published in Eurostat, the European Union’s Statistics Center, show that Iran exported 736 million euros to the European Union in the first 10 months of this year, about 22 percent more than in the same period last year.

About one-third of Iran’s total exports have been sent to Germany. Germany is also the largest exporter of goods to Iran among the 27 members of the European Union.

In the first 10 months of 2021, the country exported about 1.16 billion euros to Iran, equivalent to 37.5 percent of all EU exports to the Islamic Republic.

The total export of union members to Iran in the mentioned round was 3 billion and 88 million euros, which grew only 2 percent compared to the same period last year.

After Germany, Iran’s most important trading partners are Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and, to a certain extent, France.

In the period before the U.S. sanctions, the European Union exported \$11 billion worth of goods annually to Iran, and similarly imported goods and oil from the Islamic Republic.

Meanwhile yesterday it was announced that the value of Iran’s non-oil trade with its neighbors stood at \$33 million during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Ruhollah Latifi put the weight of non-oil trade with the neighboring countries at 110.284 million tons in the said time span, and stated that trade with the neighbors accounted for 52 percent of value and 62 percent of the weight of non-oil trade in the first eight months.

The official further stated that non-oil trade with the neighbors shows 45 percent rise in value and 19 percent growth in weight as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

As previously announced by the IRICA head, 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.

Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi has said that Iran traded over 110.3 million tons of non-oil products worth \$63.1 billion with other countries in the mentioned period. **See Page 7**

Camera Memory Destroyed in June Attack Contrary to IAEA Claim

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An official at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has rejected claims by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about the storage device of one of its cameras installed at Karaj site.

On Friday, Rafael Grossi, the director general of the IAEA, displayed the camera system similar to those used in an Iranian centrifuge-parts workshop at Karaj at a press conference in Vienna, Austria.

He claimed that critical footage from a surveillance camera at the facility had gone missing, though acknowledging that the camera -- one of the four IAEA cameras placed at the facility -- “had been destroyed” in a sabotage attack in June.

Iran removed the cameras, along with the destroyed one, and showed them to the nuclear watchdog inspectors.

However, Grossi on Friday asked for the so-called missing memory card of the destroyed camera.

“Where is it? So I’m hopeful they are going to come up with an answer because it’s very strange that it disappears,” he said at the presser. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint Iranian Drones Turn Into U.S. Nightmare

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The Islamic Republic of Iran in recent years has turned into a nightmare for the U.S. and its allies as the more the country progresses in scientific and military fields, the more the Westerners get worried and angry.

Let’s have a flashback at an amazing military achievement which happened almost ten years ago which was a turning point in Iran’s scientific and military progress.

10 years ago, Iran captured a highly-sophisticated U.S. drone in the northeast of the country. RQ-170 was brought down with minimum damage by Iran’s cyber warfare units. Iran managed to make a copy of the drone and add new features to it. Iran now has a wide-range of drones for different purposes.

And now Tehran has become one of the top ten drone manufacturers of the world so that even the U.S. fears of this progress and the future progresses of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

On Wednesday and in yet another move against Iran, the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee passed a bill to restrict the proliferation of Iran’s military drones. This is while negotiations over the removal of anti-Iran sanctions are in progress in the Austrian capital Vienna.

Tehran has time and again proven that its military prowess is purely defensive. So, how can Washington’s move be justified when the US sells bombs and drones to other countries that use them in unjust wars to kill civilians?

Here a question is raised by the impartial politicians and political analysts: How can Washington’s attempt to restrict the proliferation of Iran’s military drones be justified when the U.S. sells bombs and drones to other countries that use them in unjust wars to kill civilians?

A bipartisan group of leading members of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs just passed a bill aimed at restricting Iran’s defensive military prowess.

The Stop Iranian Drones Act bans the supply, sale, or transfer, of military drones to or from Iran under US law. The bill addresses, what the US claims to be, the growing threat of Iran’s unmanned aerial vehicle program.

However, despite attaining self-sufficiency in the arms industry, making great progress in developing and manufacturing a broad range of military equipment in recent years, Iran has time and again proven that its military capabilities are purely defensive in the face of moves by the U.S. and its regional allies, who have been fomenting chaos and tension in the region. **See Page 7**

Mora Says “Now We Have Common Basis” On Removal of Sanctions

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union deputy foreign policy chief Enrique Mora says the parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal somehow have a “common basis” on the removal of unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Mora’s remarks came on Saturday after the seventh round of talks in the Austrian capital, Vienna, confirming Iran’s announcement that the Europeans had accepted Iran’s draft proposals on how to proceed with the negotiations.

“Now we have a common basis though not entirely there on sanctions lifting chapter but that bit has a different internal logic so no big deal. Hope that clarifies why next is 8,” Mora tweeted.

Chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani announced on Friday that the three European members of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — known as the E3 — had accepted Iran’s proposals as the basis for future talks.

Bagheri Kani said the pace of reaching an agreement depended on the will of the other side.

“If the other side accepts the rational views and positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the new round of talks can be the last one and we can achieve a deal in the shortest possible time.” **See Page 7**

Himachal Growers Seek Ban on Iranian Apples

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - A couple of weeks after India suspended the import of kiwi fruit from Iran due to a rise in pest-infested consignments, apple growers in Himachal Pradesh have now demanded a blanket ban on apples and kiwis imported from Iran and Turkey.

There is a growing fear among the fruit growers about harmful pests spreading to their orchards from the foreign apples and kiwis. The fruit growers from Himachal Pradesh have sought intervention of the Union agriculture ministry in banning fruits from Iran, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

“Kiwis and apples from Iran and Turkey pose a great risk to flora and fauna of our country. We have requested the government on getting a proper quarantine protocol followed and checked on Iranian apples. These apples are also infected and being dumped on a large scale,” said Lokinder Bisht, president of Progressive Apple Growers Association. “If these incessant and uncontrolled imports are left unchecked, they would make this cash crop completely unviable to grow in our region,” he added.

The growers’ association had last year written to the government on banning kiwis and apples from Iran. Agriculture ministry’s National Plant Protection Organization had banned the import of kiwis from Iran from December 7. However, no decision had yet been taken on apples. Imported apples and kiwis have increased the threat of cataclysmic codling moths and pests spreading in apple orchards. Apples alone in Himachal are a ₹6,000-crore economy and sustain 1.75 lakh families. Of the 12 districts, apple is grown in seven with Shimla, Kullu and Kinnaur being major apple-producing areas. Kiwi farming is also gaining ground in Himachal.

Codling moth, which is unknown in India, was detected in some of the Iranian apple consignments in a few cases in Bihar and Bengal this year. Horticulture experts observe that the codling moths can cause extensive damage to the crop. Codling moth can go through two or three cycles per year. They appear at the time apple trees are in bloom to lay eggs on the leaves or fruit. The eggs hatch within six to 20 days and tiny young larvae bore into the end of the small fruit and tunnel to the core where they feed on the seed, said horticulture expert SP Bhardwaj, former associate director at Regional Fruit Research Station, Mashobra. **See Page 7**

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Iran Vaccinates Immigrants

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian interior minister said that Iran has a well-performed plan to vaccinate immigrants, which is already underway.

Ahmad Vahidi stated: "A large number of immigrants in Iran have fortunately been vaccinated, and the rest are going to be vaccinated against COVID-19."

He noted that those who intend to enter Iran must be vaccinated to maintain both Iranian and their health. Vahidi urged people to observe hygienic protocols to curb the disease.

Reaching Agreement In Vienna Depends On Will of Other Parties

VIENNA (IRNA)- Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs and top negotiator in the Vienna talks stressed that the pace of reaching an agreement in the ongoing talks depends on the will of the other side.

Ali Bagheri Kani said if the other side accepts the rational positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the new round of talks could be the last round.

Given that the new government had been formed and a new team had been assigned to the talks, this round of talks has brought the views and positions of the new government to Vienna, he said, adding, "Accordingly, we have taken into account the views, amendments and proposals of the Iranian team and included them in the negotiating documents and presented to the other side."

He further said that specifically, two documents were important for the negotiations. "One document related to the lifting of sanctions, which was the main priority and important agenda of the negotiating team. Of course, this priority is not only ours, but also other parties, including some 4 + 1 members such as China which have explicitly stated in the meetings that their priority is in line with that of Iran," Bagheri Kani added.

The Iranian diplomat further said that on the nuclear issue, "we also presented our views and positions on the draft of the sixth round of the Vienna talks" and presented them to the other side, but the difference between the nuclear document and the



sanctions lifting document was that the European side did not accept the reforms as the basis for negotiations.

Bagheri Kani emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran stood against this irrational position and stated that the positions of the new team should be taken into account and "we will discuss during the negotiations to reach an agreement reached by both sides", but unfortunately "we faced an unjustified resistance" from the European side that did not cause the Iranian team to abandon its principled and legitimate positions.

He also said that during the last week, serious negotiations took place between the parties at different levels until the European side was finally persuaded to accept Iran's position as a basis for serious and effective negotiations.

In response to a question that if Iran has received a constructive offer from the other side in the talks, Bagheri Kani said that no specific offer was made by the European side.

"They have previously stated that we have suggestions and initiatives on some issues, but during this period of discussions we did not receive any suggestions or initiatives from them," Iran's top negotiator said.

Raisi Congratulates Emir of Qatar on National Day

TEHRAN (MNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi sent a message to the Emir of Qatar to felicitate him and the people of this neighboring country on their National Day.



In his message to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, Iranian President Raisi congratulated the country's National Day.

"I offer my sincerest congratulations to Your Excellency and Qatari people on the occasion of the Qatar National Day," president Raisi said.

Expressing satisfaction with the relations between the two friendly and brotherly countries, in his message, Raisi stressed the need to develop and strengthen relations in various political, economic, and cultural fields.

"I hope that by relying on joint capacities and actively exploiting the existing capabilities, Iran and Qatar will be able to cooperate more in order to ensure the interests of the two nations", he further noted.

"I wish Your Excellency health and success, and the honorable people of the Qatar prosperity and felicity," Raisi concluded.

Envoy Reacts to Anti-Iranian Resolution at UN



TEHRAN (MNA) - Ambassador and Chargé d'affaires ad Interim of Permanent Mission of Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi reacted to the adoption of an anti-Iranian human rights resolution at the United Nations.

"The 100 countries did not accompany with the resolution, and it seems that the time has come for their representatives to protest against the self-proclaimed human rights heroes who seek to deprive independent countries of their freedom through influence, deception and misinformation," said Zahra Ershadi in reaction to the adoption of an anti-Iranian human rights resolution at the United Nations.

"Examining the list of major supporters of the resolution, such as Canada, the United States, the Israeli regime and some Western countries, reveals the fact that the main supporters of racism, occupation and those who committed indiscriminate killings of indigenous people have gathered to preach human rights," she added.

The Iranian diplomat went on to say, "The West may remain silent in the face of Canada's horrific crimes, but history will never forget that thousands of indigenous children have been sexually abused, murdered and their bodies found."

"Supporters of this resolution are more interested in gaining points and using human rights as a tool," the envoy noted. On Friday, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on what is called the "human rights situation in Iran".

In response to the approval of similar resolutions, the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes that it considers observing human rights as a religious, legal and thematic requirement in line with maintaining national interests and security and has always been committed to it.

FM Official in Pakistan to Talk Different Issues

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Director General of West Asia at Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rasoul Mousavi, who is in Islamabad to attend the meeting of senior officials of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has met with Pakistani officials on developments in Afghanistan.

Mousavi leading an Iranian Delegation met with Chairman of Institute of Strategic Studies of Islamabad (ISSI) and Director, Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) in Islamabad on Friday and discussed bilateral relations, regional developments, including the situation in Afghanistan.

The discussion was moderated by Chairman Board of Governors of ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood and was also attended by Mohammad Sorkhabi, Deputy Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Special Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran is scheduled to participate in a meeting of senior officials of the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with the agenda of Afghanistan.

An extraordinary meeting of the foreign ministers of Islamic countries hosted by the Pakistani government will be held on Sunday at the Pakistani National Assembly in Islamabad.

Iran Has No city in COVID-19 High-Risk Red Zone

TEHRAN (PressTV) - No city in Iran has been in the COVID-19 high-risk red zone during the past 24 hours, the country's Health Ministry and Medical Education said on Saturday.

According to the latest figures, eight cities are in the orange zone, while 119 are in the yellow zone. A total of 321 cities are in the blue zone.

On Friday, the number of infected people with the virus stood at 2,196, out of which 46 died and 341 were admitted to hospital, according to the ministry.

The death toll from COVID-19 in Iran currently stands at 130,992, while 16 provinces reported no death, marking a sharp decline in cases as the fifth wave of the pandemic subsides.

Coronavirus figures have been on a downward trend

since the government started a mass vaccination campaign. So far, 59,026,227 people have received the first dose of the COVID vaccine, 50,109,890 have received the second dosage and 4,460,454 have gotten the booster shots. The total number of vaccines injected in the country reached 112,596,571 doses.

However, due to the spread of the heavily-mutated Omicron coronavirus variant in more than 80 countries around the world, taking safety precautions like wearing a face mask, hand-washing and physical distancing are still the most important health protocols that remain vital.

As the Omicron variant is found to be more transmissible, the healthcare advice is unlikely to change but in the meantime, people should do well to take extra precautions.

Govt. Prepares Package to Support Stock Market

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Majid Eshqi has said a 10-part support package has been prepared for supporting the stock market and Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi is going to unveil the package soon.

"The 10-article package for supporting the capital market has been approved by the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters and the details of the proposals will be announced by the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs," Eshqi said.

Based on the mentioned package, the government is going to prevent a sharp rise in the costs of the industrial production sectors and will also help Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund, according to the official. In addition to the specific budget line provided in the next fiscal year budget bill, the fund is expected to be provided a much bigger funding, approximately 10 times the allocated figure in the national budget bill, through the transfer of shares and other financing methods so that it can do its job, Eshqi explained.

Market analysts and experts believe that the allocation of a separate budget for the Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund in the national budget bill shows that the government is taking the necessary measures to provide stronger support for the market and to ensure its growth in the future.

"The allocation of a budget line for Capital Market Development and Stabilization Fund is considered one of the most important points of the [Iranian calendar year] 1401 budget bill," market Analyst Peyman Hadadi said earlier this week.

New Successes Achieved in Oil Sales, Transferring Oil Money

TEHRAN (MNA)- Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini, the spokesman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis), said the government has achieved some success in selling oil and transferring oil money into the country.

"There have been successes in the sale of oil and the transfer of oil money into the country, and this shows that the strategy of the Islamic Republic in developing balanced relations with other countries has had a favorable result," Abbaszadeh Meshkini said

"Fortunately, despite the U.S. sanctions which seek to isolate the Islamic Republic

of Iran, the development of trade relations with other countries, including Central Asian countries, has grown by more than 200 percent," the official added.

Mentioning the ongoing talks between Iran and world powers for reviving the nuclear deal, the official said: "We stressed, in the negotiations, that the priority should be the lifting of sanctions, and the Iranian negotiating team is following up on this issue."

Earlier this month, Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji had also said that the country's oil sales in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21) increased drastically compared to the previous year.

President Seeks Completing Unfinished Projects

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says provincial trip resolutions should be followed up so that people feel that there is seriousness in solving their problems, and this should happen in practice".

Speaking on Friday evening in the Administrative Council of Yazd Province, Raisi said, "Yazd is one of the busiest provinces in the country and more attention should be paid to the issues and problems of transportation activists". He emphasized, "We hope that all the half-finished projects will be completed with funding, but in the current situation, we must focus on priorities. Among the priorities is the existing but idle or semi-active capacity that should be activated in the path of production and employment."

The President instructed the Governor-General of Yazd to form a working group to activate semi-active workshops in the province with the cooperation of the Vice-President for Executive Affairs and Minister Industry, Mines and Trade to cover all areas of the province.

Referring to the government's plan to delegate more powers to the provinces, Raisi said, "In this regard, a fund for progress and justice will be formed in each province to help provincial officials in organizing semi-finished projects and creating jobs and helping production units."

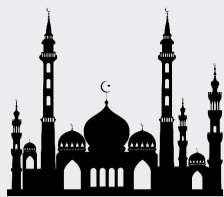
Referring to the large number of immigrants in Yazd province, Raisi stressed the need to pay attention and organize immigrants and said, "Immigrants are the guests of the Islamic Republic, but we must define a position in the administrative organization that can pursue their affairs more powerfully".

In another part of his speech, the President referred to the tourism capacities of Yazd and said, "Measures have been taken to use this capacity, but it has not been commensurate with the capacities of the province, and we hope that by the end of COVID-19, the tourism sector will become more active".

Stating that the private sector in Yazd province is active at a high level, Raisi said, "The people of Yazd have good participation in various economic sectors, which is to be appreciated and officials should appreciate this cooperation and participation."

The President also referred to the restoration of one thousand hectares of the historical parts of Yazd and added, "The proposal of the Minister of Roads and Urban Development to support this project by paying loans is a good proposal that the Minister of Cultural Heritage should also consider".

Referring to the Supreme Leader of the Revolution's emphasis on the fair distribution of doctors in the country, Ayatollah Raisi said, "We do not have enough doctors in the country and the Minister of Health should pursue the fair distribution of doctors throughout the country."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:39
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:09

15. And that cry of theirs ceased not, till We made them as a field that is mown,
as ashes silent and quenched.

16. Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the earth and all that is between!

Surah 21, The Prophets (15 - 16)

3 Iranian Trade Centers To Be Launched In China 2022

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran-China Trade Center Majid Reza Hariri says three Iranian trade centers will be launched in China in 2022 which will help the non-oil goods exports to China.

Speaking to the news website of ICCIMA, Hariri explained the programs of the chamber for promoting non-oil exports to China in the sanctions era and announced the launch of three Iranian trade centers and holding exhibitions on Iranian goods in China in 2022.

He said that the chamber has plans for two scenarios of sanctions and removal of sanctions era in case the Vienna talks fail, adding that if today the parties in Vienna talks reach agreement, the trade volume of Iran and China will be more than double next year and it will be accelerated.

He went on to say that Iran-China's highest trade volume was set in 2014 when their trade hit \$51.8b but today it has declined to around \$17b which means one-third of the historic record and the trade can bounce back immediately when the sanctions are removed.

Hariri said that if the Vienna talks fail, then the chamber will implement the project for promoting national non-oil exports to China which has been signed in 2019, adding that unfortunately the project did not come into effect in 2019 because of the COVID pandemic because its implementation needed exchange of traders.



He noted that the chamber has had meetings with foreign ministry and Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (PTO) for implementing this scenario, adding that next year three Iranian trade centers will be inaugurated in China which will be used as the platform for permanent exhibition of Iranian goods. He added that the chamber has prepared certain mechanisms for trade of certain goods which will come into effect in the centers. He added that the chamber so far has predicted 12 stores as the trade centers to put on display Iranian products in China, adding that the licenses for these stores will be issued by the chamber and PTO and their launches will be pursued by Iranian and Chinese investors.

Hariri went on to say that the chamber has prepared good plans for trade exchange between Tehran and Beijing in order that they cannot face any problems due to the sanctions.

He reiterated that if the problem of travel between Iran and China is solved next year, their trade volume will increase by 35% and while the country is under sanctions, it can boost its trade volume with China to \$60b in 5 years.

IME Posts Higher Records In Trade Value and Volume

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,076,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$543m,



posting growths of 4% in volume and 3% in value of trades compared to the figures of the previous week.

According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1,546,000 tons of commodities valued at almost \$301m.

Commodities sold on this floor included 1,153,000 tons of cement, 247,502 tons of steel, 86,000 tons of sponge iron, 40,000 tons of iron ore, 10,125 tons of aluminum, 7,420 tons of copper, 2,000 tons of cast iron ingots, 1,145 tons of zinc, 140 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 18 tons of precious metals concentrate and 1 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 523,000 tons of commodities worth nearly \$239m.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 202,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 147,000 tons of bitumen, 80,407 tons of polymeric products, 59,500 tons of lube cut, 29,482 tons of chemicals, 3,641 tons of base oil, 1,000 tons of slops wax, 520 tons of sulfur, 150 tons of argon and 48 tons of inulation.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 5,395 tons of commodities traded on it.

National Information Network Will Not Cut Off Global Connection



TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's minister of communications and information technology says establishing National Information Network does not mean cutting off access to the global internet.

Attending his first press conference on Saturday, Issa Zarepour said: "Establishing the National Information Network does not mean cutting off access to the global Internet, but it involves the time when the country wants to connect with international communications, use its maximum capacity and have a good experience in the future."

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

He stated that the National Information Network would facilitate users' access to information on the Internet with higher speed, better quality, and limitlessness and with fewer costs.

Elaborating on how technology has affected people's livelihood, Zarepour noted: "Many countries have launched their own National Information Network since it was a civilization-making tool."

He underlined the importance of launching the National Information Network on Feb 15, 2022, adding that a particular part has been allocated to the National Information Network to eradicate any problems with the submitted budget plan 2022 to the Parliament.

The minister highlighted the services which will be offered by launching the National Information Network, including E-government to eliminate corruption, better quality services to all, public services and basic applied services.

He said the Digital Economy Committee in the administration would be formed with the participation of two vice presidents and four ministers to increase the share of the digital economy in the country's economy to 10%.

"We have envisaged a new mechanism in the Ministry of Communications to realize the National Information Network in the country," he added.

Departure Tax Not to Exceed 520,000 Tomans

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Following recent uncertainties about the increase in departure tax, the head of Iran's parliament's tourism faction speculated that "due to the inflation available", the amount of complications next year (1401) would not exceed 520,000 tomans.

Mohammad Reza Dashti Ardakani, head of Iran's parliament's tourism faction, said that the amount would be determined based on the "available inflation rate."

Last week, Esteghnnews reported that the government in next year's budget bill set the revenue from the country's exit duties at 1,500 billion tomans. This figure was 110 billion tomans in this year's budget. Accordingly, the site had calculated that in order to achieve this income, the departure tax should increase from the current 400,000 tomans to 5.2 million tomans next year.

Mojtaba Tavangar, a member of parliament's economic commission, earlier responded to news of a 14-fold increase in exit duties next year, saying that the government's income from the passenger departure site next year was similar to 2019 and that "the complications of 1401 were determined in the years before the coronavirus outbreak" and did not make much difference.

According to the parliamentarian, the government estimated its revenue at 1,610 billion tomans in 2019, but in 1400 it dropped to 110 billion tomans due to the coronavirus outbreak. In next year's budget, but with the possibility of increased travel and the end of the coronavirus crisis, government revenue from this location is projected to be 1,500 billion tomans, and the stark difference between this year and next year goes back to that.

According to Dashti Ardakani, the number of travelers abroad this year was only about 10,000 due to the coronavirus outbreak, but due to vaccinations and a decrease in the death toll, it is expected to reach 10 million next year.

Asphalt Roads Available to 32,000 Villages in Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Standard asphalt roads have reached a majority of Iranian villages, says an official, as the country moves to reduce the gap between urban and rural regions to prevent migration to large cities.

Khodadad Moghbeli, who heads rural roads department in the Iranian transportation ministry, said that some 82% of Iranians living in villages with more than 20 households have now access to asphalt roads.

Moghbeli said that the coverage is below 70% in seven out of 31 provinces in Iran where villages are mostly scattered in remote mountainous areas.

Iran has nearly 55,000 villages of which around 39,000 are populated by more than 20 families. Latest government figures show that 26% of the country's population of 85 million lives in the countryside.

The government has been providing basic services like utilities, fast internet and asphalt roads to villages in remote regions. The policy is aimed at preventing migration to large cities, a phenomenon that has caused massive social and economic problems in the country over the past decades.

Moghbeli said that the government plans to construct 32,000 kilometers of asphalt roads in rural regions to complete the coverage for the remaining 7,000 villages that accommodate more than 20 households.

He said the five-year project would need some 550 trillion rials (over 1.8 billion) in finances of which the government has committed to provide 120 trillion in the short-run.

Official figures show that Iran's transportation ministry spends around \$10 million each year on maintenance asphalt roads in the countryside.

HOSCO Cooperating With Knowledge-Based Companies



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Representatives of some knowledge-based companies of East Azarbaijan Province paid a visit to Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) and during their visit conferred with the officials of the company.

During the visit the representatives of the knowledge-based companies of East Azarbaijan toured the technical units of the company and both sides exchanged views on their needs and capabilities. Preparing the roadmap for continuation of cooperation was one of the achievements of this visit and accordingly in this roadmap, Hormozgan Science and Technology Park and Technology Research Fund of Hormozgan Province as the representatives of the knowledge-based companies will cooperate with HOSCO.

The CEO of HOSCO in the meeting emphasized interactions with the knowledge-based companies in line with development of the company as well as using potentials of the knowledge-based companies in line with indigenization and meeting the technological demands of HOSCO.

Isfahan Has Lowest Water Consumption Per Capita

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – In the first regional conference of Water, the Lifeblood, participants emphasized resolving the water issue nationally and through a unanimous cooperation between the public and the officials.

Secretary of the conference Mr. Mohammad Reza Shabakhi Zavareh in the conference said that the conference was held at Dr. Ali Shariati Hall of the town of Zavareh simultaneous with the Research Day was aimed at reflecting the condition of the slump in the underground water level and land subsidence.

He said out of 33 received articles by the secretariat of the conference, 15 articles were confirmed and four of them were presented as speech.

Advisor to Energy Minister Meisam Jafarzadeh addressing the conference said that currently the issue of water has turned into a national crisis and to come out of this crisis needs a national approach and unity between the public and executive and scientific officials.

Meanwhile the CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater



Company (ABFA of Isfahan) Mr. Hashem Anini termed the conference as a prudent and wise approach of the public and officials of Isfahan Province towards the issue of water, adding that this conference reflected the approach of citizens of the town of Ardestan to the issue of water is compromising and managing the water in the time of drought.

He noted that in the past 12 years all required infrastructures have been prepared for serving in the field of water and wastewater in all areas of the province.

Anini added that the decrease in the water consumption per capita in Isfahan is one of the factors for sustainable water supply, adding that the water per capita consumption in 2007 was 189 liters per day and due to culture building and good cooperation of the public this figure decreased to 157 liters two years ago.

He went on to say that through preparing good infrastructures, the amount of water waste in the water supply system has decreased considerably and it has reached 18 percent which is among the lowest among the 31 provinces in the country.

27 Feared Dead in Building Fire in Japan's Osaka

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Twenty-seven people were feared dead after a blaze swept through a commercial building housing a mental health clinic in the Japanese city of Osaka on Friday, fire officials said.

TV footage showed dozens of firefighters working inside and outside the narrow office building after the blaze was extinguished.

The charred interior of the fourth floor, which housed a clinic that provided mental health services and general medical care, was visible through broken and blackened windows.

An Osaka police spokesman told AFP that officers were investigating the cause of the fire.



Two Dead, 20 Trapped Workers Rescued From Chinese Mine

BEIJING (AFP) - Twenty workers were saved and two bodies recovered on Friday from a flooded coal mine after a dramatic rescue operation lasting over two days, officials said.

A huge recovery effort was launched when the illegal mine in northern China's coal-producing Shanxi province flooded late Wednesday, with authorities vowing to crack down on illicit operations that have sprung up in response to price surges.

State media had previously reported 21 people were trapped in the mine in Xiaoyi city, where hundreds of rescuers workers used pumps to drain the water.



Russia Tells NATO to Leave Eastern Europe



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia said on Friday it wanted a legally binding guarantee that the NATO military alliance would give up any military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine, part of a wish list of ambitious security guarantees it wants to negotiate with the West.

The demands form a package that Moscow says is an essential requirement for lowering tensions in Europe and defusing a crisis over Ukraine, which Western countries have accused Russia of sizing up for a potential new attack - something it has denied. But they also contained elements - such as an effective Russian veto on NATO membership for Ukraine - that the West has already ruled out.

Presenting the demands in detail for the first time, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told reporters that Russia and the West must start from a clean sheet in rebuilding relations. "The line pursued by the United States and NATO over recent years to aggressively escalate the security situation is absolutely unacceptable and extremely dangerous," he said.

"Washington and its NATO allies should immediately stop regular hostile actions against our country, including unscheduled exercises, dangerous rapprochements and maneuvers of military ships and planes, and stop the military development of Ukrainian territory," he said.

Sam Greene, professor of Russian politics at King's College London, said on Twitter that President Vladimir Putin was "drawing a line around the post-Soviet space and planting a 'keep out' sign. It's not meant to be a treaty: it's a declaration."

"But that doesn't necessarily mean this is a prelude to war. It's a justification for keeping Moscow's hair-trigger stance, in order to keep Washington and others off balance. Question is, how long can that be maintained, before it loses its efficacy?"

Ryabkov told reporters that Russia was not willing to put up with the current situation any more. He urged the United States to take the proposals seriously and come up with a constructive response fast.

Ryabkov said Russia was ready to start talks as soon as Saturday, with Geneva as a possible venue, and that its negotiating team was ready.

When asked about the U.S. response to Russia's proposals so far, Ryabkov said: "As far as the broader picture is concerned, they haven't said 'no'. They haven't said 'yes' to us, but they haven't said 'no' either".

Moscow handed over its proposals to the United States earlier this week amid soaring tensions over a build-up of Russian troops near Ukraine.

Russia says it is responding to what it sees as threats to its own security from Ukraine's increasingly close relations with NATO and aspirations to join the alliance, even though there is no imminent prospect of Ukraine being allowed to join.

Johnson Suffers By-Election Disaster

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Friday suffered a crushing by-election defeat in a constituency never previously lost by his Conservative Party, a result which raises serious questions about his leadership.

His party won the seat in North Shropshire, central England, by a massive majority in 2019, but that was wiped out by the Liberal Democrats in Thursday's vote in a result that will intensify the mutinous mood among Conservative MPs.

Johnson, 57, was already reeling after roughly 100 of his MPs rebelled in parliament Tuesday against the government's introduction of vaccine passes for large events.

The UK leader's authority has also been clobbered repeatedly in recent weeks by claims of corruption and reports that he and his staff broke coronavirus restrictions last Christmas.

Weeks of bad headlines turned what would normally be a routine victory in the safe rural seat -- won by 23,000 votes just two years ago -- into a shattering defeat of almost 6,000 votes, while surging virus cases have added to a sense of crisis.

The government reported nearly 89,000 new infections Thursday, the second consecutive record daily tally.

Winning candidate Helen Morgan said that voters had sent a message "loudly and clearly" to Johnson that "the party's over."

"Your government, run on lies and bluster will be held accountable. It can and will be defeated," she vowed.

Defeat will likely see more MPs filing letters of no-confidence in their leader, which could trigger an internal party vote to remove him.

The same process saw his predecessor Theresa May ousted in mid-2019 after MPs including Johnson voted against her Brexit deal in parliament.

The Liberal Democrats appeared to have been helped by supporters of the main national opposition Labour party lending them their votes.

"I'll be voting for the Liberal Democrats because I'm so offended by the performance of Johnson," Martin Hill, 68, who normally votes Labour, told AFP earlier this week.

"It'll be a tactical vote -- I want to give Johnson a slap in the face."

However, others in the small town of Whitchurch were prepared to overlook the former London mayor's transgressions.



Hundreds Protests in Tunisia on Anniversary of Revolution

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Hundreds rallied for and against Tunisian President Kais Saied in central Tunis on Friday, on the eleventh anniversary of the start of a revolution that sparked the Arab Spring uprisings.

Saied in July this year sacked the government, froze parliament and seized far-reaching powers.

Parliamentarians and his Islamist-inspired opponents Ennahdha have bitterly opposed the moves, but many Tunisians tired of a system seen as corrupt and ineffective have welcomed them.

Several hundred anti-Saied protesters gathered near the city centre on Friday, shouting, "the people want the coup d'etat to fall", referring to Saied's power grab, as dozens of police looked on.

Some demonstrators held signs in support of the North African country's 2014 constitution, which Saied said earlier this week he wants to revise and put to a new referendum.

A few hundred metres along Habib Bourguiba Avenue -- the epicentre of demonstrations over a decade ago -- and past hundreds of police officers and metal barriers, a smaller number of Saied supporters rallied as speakers blared out the national anthem.

"We are with you to the end in the fight against corruption," read a banner bearing a picture of Saied and a Tunisian flag.

On December 17, 2010, street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi set himself alight in the marginalised town of Sidi Bouzid, sparking a four-week revolt that forced veteran dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power and sparked a string of uprisings in other Arab countries.

Saied earlier this month moved the official anniversary of the revolution from January 14 -- the date Ben Ali fled into exile -- to December 17.

On Monday, the former constitutional law lecturer prolonged his suspension of parliament, dominated by Ennahdha, until new elections in December next year.

Ethiopia Risks Descent Into Generalized Violence

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Countries urged the top UN rights body to send international investigators to conflict-hit Ethiopia amid warnings of looming generalized violence, as Addis Ababa accused them of hijacking the process to exert "political pressure".

Addressing an emergency meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, deputy rights chief Nada al-Nashif cautioned that Ethiopia's brutal 13-month conflict in the northern Tigray region could "escalate into generalized violence."

This, she said, would have "major implications, not only for millions of people in Ethiopia, but also across the region".

The meeting was called to consider launching an international investigation into allegations of horrifying abuses in the country, including mass killings and sexual violence.

The session, which was requested by the European Union with support of more than 50 countries, was slammed by Ethiopia as "an instrument of political pressure".

Many diplomats voiced alarm at reports of atrocities in the conflict, which the UN says has left thousands dead, displaced more than two million people and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine.

"The gravity and scale of violations and atrocities committed against civilians by all sides, including

sexual and gender-based violence and ethnic violence, is unacceptable," Slovenia's ambassador Anita Pipan said on behalf of the EU.

The bloc is pushing for an international investigation into abuses committed since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in 2020 after accusing the region's ruling party of attacking federal army camps.

A joint investigation by the UN rights office warned last month that possible war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed by all sides during the conflict.

Al-Nashif said Friday the rights office had since continued "to receive credible reports of severe human rights violations and abuses by all parties".

She voiced particular concern about surging rights abuses after a nationwide state of emergency was declared on November 2, with mass arrests mainly of ethnic Tigrayans.

"While some of those arrested over the past six weeks have been released, we estimate that between 5,000 and 7,000 remain detained, including nine UN staff members," she said.

Friday's draft resolution is calling on the council to create "an international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia" to probe a wide range of alleged violations and abuses by all sides.



New center-Right Gov't Takes Office in Czech Republic

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala's new centre-right government has taken office as it faces soaring inflation and energy costs, record budget deficits and the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

The 57-year-old former university professor leads a coalition of five parties spanning his fiscally conservative Civic Democrats to the more liberal Pirates party which is entering government for the first time.

The coalition, which analysts expect to be more pro-Western and more engaged with the European Union than its predecessor, takes over on Friday at a time of soaring costs for households and a wave of coronavirus infections straining hospitals.

It also inherits an agenda including a potential tender for new nuclear power plant units costing billions of euros.

The new government secured 108 seats in the 200-member lower house in an October election, giving it a strong majority.

But it faces opposition from outgoing Prime Minister Andrej Babis's ANO party, which is the biggest single group in the lower house, and the far-right SPD.

"We are not starting in an easy situation. We are facing huge problems like COVID, energy prices, inflation and all that it brings," Fiala said after the appointment of his government.

The Czech Republic has seen a surge in COVID-19 cases stronger than previous waves though numbers have eased in past weeks. The government wants to boost its vaccination numbers that lag behind the European Union while keeping curbs lighter than in the past.

The cabinet will also look for ways to ease the burden of inflation at a 13-year high and rising energy costs made worse in October when a large electricity and gas supplier halted operations amid a Europe-wide jump in prices.

A plan to cut spending in the 2022 budget by 80 billion Czech koruna (\$3.58bn) presents the first big test: the parties must agree on savings and navigate a budget in which essential items have jumped in recent years due to rapid rises in pensions and public wages.

Fiala avoided one possible clash this week by agreeing to the government's appointment with President Milos Zeman, who opposed the nomination of the Pirate party's Jan Lipavsky, 36, as foreign minister.



Velenjak Apt (\$2200)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J
L.balcony
pkg, & yard
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Darrous Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
yard, & F.F

Parsian

Zaferanieh (\$3000) 400sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F
Gheitarieh (\$2200) 220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F
Sa`adat abad (\$1800) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F

Aghdasieh (\$2700) 220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F

Jordan Apts
(\$1600) 2bdrs, 140sq.m, F.F
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Saudi Arabia October Total Oil Exports Rise to 8.26m bpd

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's total oil exports in October rose to 8.26 million barrels per day (bpd), their highest since April 2020, from 7.84 million bpd in September, official data showed on Thursday.

Monthly export figures are provided by Riyadh and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to the Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI), which published them on its website.



Turkey Hikes Minimum Wage By 50% in Face of Lira Crisis

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey will hike its minimum wage by a massive 50% to 4,250 lira (\$275.44) per month next year to address a currency crash and inflation spike, President Tayyip Erdogan said.

The dollar value of the 2021 minimum wage - some 2,825 lira monthly - has tumbled to \$185 from \$380 at the start of the year due to the currency crisis, Turkey's second in four years.

Erdogan's unorthodox policy of cutting interest rates in the face of price rises sparked the selloff in the lira, which is down 40% since the beginning of last month alone.

He said the uncertainty generated by market volatility and inflation would end soon.

"With this increase, I believe that we have demonstrated our determination to protect our employees from being crushed in the face of price increases," Erdogan said, adding the wage would be the highest ever.

The government would also lift taxes on the minimum wage to ease burdens on employers, he said.

Inflation jumped above 21% last month and is expected to hit 30% next year largely due to the currency slide, which boosts import prices.

Erdogan was speaking after the central bank again cut its policy rate, by 100 basis points to 14%, as part of his new economic program that emphasizes exports, credit and growth ahead of elections in 2023.

The lira plunged as much as 5.6% to a record low of 16 versus the dollar after the rate cut.

"Our currency is known, and it is the lira, and we will not let it be swallowed," Erdogan said.

"We are determined to put an end to the uncertainty that has arisen due to the fluctuations in the exchange rate and the exorbitant price increases as soon as possible."

The lira's collapse has upended household budgets and plans, while soaring prices across the board have drawn backlash. Turks have seen their earnings erode since the central bank, under pressure from Erdogan, began slashing rates in September.

Erdogan said stability will be ensured with new measures in the coming days, but did not specify what they were.

The central bank's 100 basis point rate cut, in line with the forecasts, brought its cumulative easing since September to 500 points, making the local currency even less attractive to investors and savers.

The bank signaled it would pause the easing cycle to monitor its effects in the next three months.

"The central bank's tolerance for lira pain certainly appears much higher this go around with Erdogan now more or less fully in charge of rates policy," said Dennis Shen, director of the sovereign and public sector at Scope Ratings.

Erdogan's new economic plan prioritizes exports and lending, even though economists and opposition lawmakers have widely criticized the policy as reckless. With inflation soaring above 21%, Turks' budgets are straining and anxieties are building.

World Bank Recommends Indonesia Cut Coal Subsidies Amid Green Transition

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - The World Bank has urged Indonesia to drop a policy forcing miners to supply a set amount of subsidized coal to its state power company, which it said has encouraged the use of the dirty fuel in electricity generation.

The recommendation is part of a report released on Thursday intended to encourage more private investment in renewable energy in Indonesia to help the country achieve a target of becoming carbon neutral by 2060 or sooner.

The Southeast Asian country is the biggest exporter of thermal coal globally and among the top ten green house gas emitters. Indonesia has a so-called Domestic Market Obligation (DMO) policy whereby coal miners must supply 25% of annual production to state utility Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN), at a maximum price of \$70 per ton, well below current market prices.

The policy has effectively subsidized coal-fired power plants, the bank said.

"It incentivizes more consumption of carbon, which sends distorted price signals, which discourages a transition away to cleaner sources of energy," Habib Rab, the bank's lead economist for Indonesia, told reporters, adding it also reduced private investment into renewables.

The bank also recommended changing rules on minimum local content requirements for energy projects because this had increased project costs and impeded competition. For solar panels, Indonesia has a 40% minimum local content requirement which is expected to be raised further in the future.

Under World Bank simulations, more private investment would ensure the energy transition had a greater impact on economic growth and job creation.

However, the bank also said poor and vulnerable households needed to be protected during key transition phases, when the government is expected to gradually raise power tariffs to give PLN the revenue to finance its investments.

PLN in September announced a plan to increase Indonesia's renewable power capacity to 25% of its energy mix by 2030 by no longer commissioning new coal projects and investing in solar and hydro power, among others.

Renewables currently make up around 12% of Indonesia's energy sources, while coal contributes roughly 60%.



Qatar Central Bank to Start Gradual Reduction of Pandemic Stimulus

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The central bank of Qatar said it will start working on a gradual reduction of the measures introduced to support the economy given the recovery from the impact of the coronavirus crisis in the tiny but wealthy Persian Gulf state.

"QCB will begin with the implementation of the future strategy for a gradual reduction of the exceptional support stimulus packages that it launched," it said in a statement.

This will be done "through a gradual and deliberate exit that takes into account the various interaction between monetary policy measures and the continuity of economic and banking activity in the State of Qatar," the central bank added.

Qatari authorities made available a support package of 75 billion riyals (\$20.60 billion), or about 14% of gross domestic product, in response to the downturn last year, of which 50 billion riyals was central bank liquidity support.

The central bank said the local financial and banking system was stable and domestic liquidity high.

Ratings agency S&P Global Ratings last month affirmed its 'AA-(minus)' rating of Qatar, saying that the country's fiscal and external buffers mitigated the risks deriving from a rapid growth of foreign debt in the banking system.



Euro Zone Business Growth Slipped in December

LONDON (Dispatches) - Euro zone business growth slowed more than expected this month as renewed restrictions imposed to curb the Omicron coronavirus variant curtailed the recovery in the bloc's dominant services industry, a survey showed.

Europe is facing a fourth wave of infections and many governments have been encouraging citizens to stay home and avoid unnecessary social contact.

IHS Markit's Flash Composite Purchasing Managers' Index, a good indicator of overall economic health, dropped to 53.4 in December from 55.4 in November, its lowest since March and below the 54.0 predicted in a Reuters poll.

That headline number was dragged down by the services PMI, which sank to an eight-month low of 53.3 from 55.9. While above the 50-mark separating growth from contraction it missed the Reuters poll estimate for 54.1.

"The renewed decline in the Composite PMI in December suggests growth slowed to a crawl as tighter restrictions and growing consumer caution are taking their toll on economic activity, with the service sector bearing the brunt," said Michael Tran at Capital Economics.

Growth in demand for services dropped to its lowest since April - when it contracted - with the new business index falling to 52.6 from 54.2.

In the German private sector growth evaporated as restrictions hit the services sector in Europe's largest economy, earlier data showed.

Meanwhile, in France - the euro zone's second biggest economy and the only other country in the bloc to report flash data - activity expanded at a slower pace, a trend partly due to the new COVID-19 variant.

In Britain, outside the currency bloc, the new variant hammered hospitality and travel companies, sending private sector growth to a 10-month low, its PMI showed ahead of a Bank of England policy announcement due later on Thursday.

The Bank's decision is a close call. Investors had been largely betting against an increase in Bank Rate with the new coronavirus wave in full swing until data on Wednesday showed British consumer price inflation leapt by far more than expected and hit a decade-high in November.

Factories, generally less affected by coronavirus restrictions, also suffered somewhat and the manufacturing PMI dipped to a 10-month low of 58.0 from November's 58.4. An index measuring output that feeds into the composite PMI nudged up to 53.9 from 53.8.

In one brighter spot for policymakers at the European Central Bank, who meet later on Thursday, price pressures abated although remained high. The input prices index eased to 87.0 from 88.9, and the output prices index staged an even bigger fall.

Japan's Exports Pick Up

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's exports sped up in November, as supply constraints eased slightly for the country's big automakers, although imports hit a record on soaring materials costs, which could hurt household consumption.

The trade data came days after the Bank of Japan's quarterly tankan survey showed an improvement in service-sector sentiment, suggesting robust consumption will support the recovery, although the new Omicron variant and rising costs remain downside risks.

Exports climbed 20.5% in November from a year earlier, government data showed on Thursday, the ninth straight month of increase, slightly missing forecasts for a 21.2% gain but well up on a 9.4% rise in the previous month.

Shipments of cars - Japan's No.1 export item - rose 4.1% from a year earlier, marking the first increase in three months, although auto exports to the United States and China decreased year-on-year. "The jump in exports in November suggests that most supply chain constraints in the automobile sector had already eased last month," said Tom Learmouth, Japan economist at Capital Economics.

"Exports will remain strong over the coming months as motor vehicle exports recover further and external demand for capital goods continues to rise."

Other than cars, growing shipments of steel, semiconductor equipment and chips contributed the most to the increase, a government official said.

Shipments to China, Japan's biggest trade partner, increased 16.0% year-on-year, the data showed. Imports rose 43.8% year-on-year in November to 8.32 trillion yen (\$72.87 billion), the largest yen amount since comparable data became available in January 1979 and jacked up by a 144.1% rise in fuels such as oil, LNG and coal.

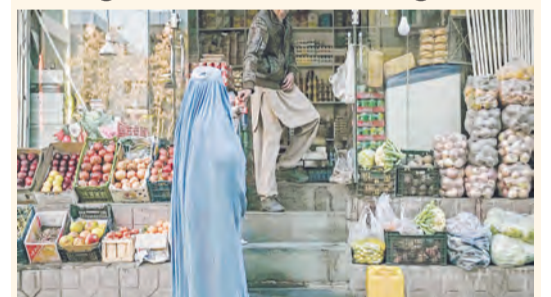
Imports growth accelerated from 26.7% in October and was bigger than economists' forecast of 40.0%. That brought a trade deficit of 954.8 billion yen, the biggest shortfall since January 2020 and exceeding the median estimate for a 675.0 billion yen deficit.

"While the weak yen has certain benefits such as boosting exporters' competitiveness and inbound tourists' spending, more Japanese manufacturers have shifted production bases offshore and COVID-19 border controls shut out tourists now," said Masato Koike, senior economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute.

"Rising costs are weighing on Japan when a weak yen has less impact on increasing sales of goods and services."

The BOJ's latest tankan survey on Monday showed rising raw material costs clouding the corporate and economic outlook. BOJ governor Haruhiko Kuroda said on Wednesday inflation may approach its elusive 2% target.

Taliban Prepare New Afghan Budget Without Foreign Aid



KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's finance ministry under the new Taliban government has prepared a draft national budget that, for the first time in two decades, is funded without foreign aid, a spokesman said.

It comes as the country is mired in economic crisis and faces a looming humanitarian catastrophe the United Nations has called an "avalanche of hunger".

Finance ministry spokesman Ahmad Wali Haqmal did not disclose the size of the draft budget -- which runs until December 2022 -- but told AFP it would go to the cabinet for approval before being published.

"We are trying to finance it from our domestic revenues -- and we believe we can," he earlier told state television in an interview shared on Twitter.

Global donors suspended financial aid when the Taliban seized power in August and Western powers also froze access to billions of dollars in assets held abroad.

The 2021 budget, put together by the previous administration under IMF guidance, projected a deficit despite 219 billion Afghanis in aid and grants and 217 billion from domestic revenue.

At that time the exchange rate was around 80 Afghanis to the dollar, but the local currency has been hammered since the Taliban's return, particularly in the past week, slumping to 130 on Monday before recovering Friday to around 100.

Haqmal accepted that public servants are still owed several months of wages, saying "we are trying our best" to make good on overdue pay by year-end.

He warned, however, a new pay scale had also been prepared.

"Orthodontics" to Vie at 2022 Sundance Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short film 'Orthodontics' directed by Mohammadreza Mayghani, will take part in the competition section of the 2022 Sundance Film Festival.

The Iranian short film 'Orthodontics' directed, written, and produced by Mohammadreza Mayghani, will compete with 16 films from different countries in the main competition section of the Sundance Film Festival.

Sundance Film Festival is scheduled to be held in person from January 20 to 30, 2022, in the United States.

The synopsis of 'Orthodontics' reads, "Amitis is a teenage girl who always has an orthodontics headgear and under the pressure of orthodontic treatment. But suddenly she does a strange thing with her friend Sara."



Beijing Condemns U.S. Sanctions on Chinese Painkiller Firms

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Beijing hit out at the United States for its decision to impose sanctions on Chinese painkiller makers as Washington tries to curb an addiction epidemic that killed a record 100,000 Americans last year.

As people dealing with addiction increasingly turn to cheaper pills bought online from abroad, President Joe Biden signed an executive order on Wednesday that makes it easier for the United States to target foreign drug traffickers.

The actions "will help disrupt the global supply chain and the financial networks that enable synthetic opioids and precursor chemicals to reach the United States," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

China said it "resolutely opposes" the move.

"These kinds of erroneous acts, in which one side is sick but forces the other to take the medicine, is not constructive," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters.

U.S. law enforcement says China remains a major source of both fentanyl and chemicals used to make both the powerful opioid, as well as other synthetic drugs.

Beijing insists it has taken measures to control fentanyl production and precursors. Under Biden's new executive order, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on four Chinese chemical companies and one individual, Chuen Fat Yip, whom it described as "one of the largest, if not the largest, producer of anabolic steroids in the world".

The US State Department also put up a reward offer of up to \$5 million for the arrest of the 68-year-old, who is believed to live in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

In federal charges filed in 2018, his company was accused of producing some \$280 million of anabolic steroids over five years and sending ingredients for the painkiller fentanyl through small packages sent around the world.

Last month, U.S. authorities seized the equivalent of \$2.3 million in the cryptocurrency bitcoin traced back to Chuen, prosecutors based in Dallas said.

The U.S. Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on two criminal drug groups in Mexico and one in Brazil.

The sanctions will block any assets in the United States that the groups or Chuen may have and criminalize transactions from the U.S.

More than 100,000 Americans died in the year through April from painkiller overdoses, an epidemic initially blamed on the way drug companies eagerly promoted their use, and how readily available they became to people in despair.

Painkiller addiction has spiked more recently due to a proliferation of fake drugs, often smuggled in from overseas, that can be bought online.

Biden's executive order allows the United States to target foreign drug makers



directly rather than focusing on cartels or other criminal groups, historically the focus of U.S. efforts.

Biden also established the U.S. Council on Transnational Organized Crime, which will coordinate among departments to combat transnational crime.

A 2020 report by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency said that while Mexican drug traffickers were increasingly producing tablets that are smuggled into the United States, the primary source of fentanyl materials -- some sent to Mexico -- originated in China.

The report said that India, known for its giant pharmaceutical industry, was also quickly becoming a source of illicit painkillers.

"I think it's very simple that a lot of the precursors to synthetic opioids originate in China," a Biden administration official said of Wednesday's actions.

"And it was important for us to send a signal on that front."

Under heavy pressure from the United States, China decreed a ban on fentanyl in April 2019.

A report last year by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies found that Chinese makers quickly branched out to sell the precursors inside fentanyl, which are not banned and often have legal uses as well.

The Chinese sellers often sell the ingredients openly on the web, helping to secure credibility and customers, it said.

The prosecutors in Texas said that Chuen was even believed to have travelled to the United States in 2015 to attend a trade show and negotiate transactions.

UN Says Hunger On the Rise in the Arab World



CAIRO (AFP) - A third of people in the 420-million-strong Arab world do not have enough to eat, the United Nations said Thursday, highlighting that 69 million suffered from malnutrition last year.

In a report, the world body's Food and Agriculture Organization said that between 2019 and 2020, the number of malnourished in the Arab world rose by 4.8 million people to 69 million, nearly 16 percent of the population.

"The increase in the levels of undernourishment has occurred across all income levels, in conflict-affected as well as non-conflict countries," the FAO said.

"In addition, nearly 141 million people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 -- an increase of more than 10 million people since 2019."

It said the Covid-19 pandemic "brought another major shock", with the number of undernourished people in the region increasing by 4.8 million compared with 2019.

Conflict-hit Somalia and Yemen remained the worst-affected countries last year, with nearly 60 percent of Somalis going hungry and more than 45 percent of Yemenis undernourished.

"Yemen had the highest prevalence of anaemia in 2020, affecting 61.5 percent of women of reproductive age," it said.

The FAO said hunger has increased by 91.1 percent in the Arab world over the past two decades.

"Rates of stunting (20.5 percent) and overweight (10.7 percent) among children under five years of age were high in 2020," the FAO noted.

It said adult obesity, especially in the richer Arab states, was also on the rise.

"The latest year estimate for the Arab region shows that 28.8 percent of the adult population was obese, i.e. more than double the global average of 13.1 percent.

"High-income countries exhibited the highest prevalence of adult obesity in the region whereas the low-income countries had the lowest levels."

Tehran Warns of...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's top negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, announced on Twitter Friday that "good progress" had been made, and that the discussions would continue after a "break of a few days."

The security official said, "The relatively successful trend of the Vienna talks can strengthen the motivation of the [Israeli] regime to carry out acts of mischief."

He warned that a malicious Israeli act, which could be designed to mount pressure on Iran to give in to the West's excessive demands, would definitely afflict the United States as the Tel Aviv regime is a strategic

partner of Washington and the Western countries participating in the Vienna talks.

"If the objective of the Zionist regime is an act of mischief against Iran's nuclear facilities, it will inevitably have a negative and deterrent effect on Iran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)," he said.

"Based on their inherent duties, the country's military and security forces will take any possible threats seriously and increase the level of necessary preparations to deal with them."

Camera Memory...

FROM PAGE 1

Later on Friday, Noor News, which is close to the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, quoted an informed AEOI official as explaining that the camera's data storage device was also destroyed in attack.

"The camera's data storage device, wanted by the IAEA chief, has been destroyed in a sabotage operation," the unnamed official said, adding, "The IAEA must answer why it does not use its capabilities to prevent such sabotage attacks with known origins?"

"The IAEA, in addition to its supervisory duties, has safeguarding responsibilities toward its members, and in this case, it should be held accountable for not preventing the threat against Iran's nuclear sites and not taking effective action in this regard," the Iranian official further said.

The Israeli regime, which has assassinated at least seven Iranian nuclear scientists, is deemed to be the prime suspect in several sabotage operations that have targeted Iran's nuclear facilities over the past years.

The development came after the IAEA and Iran agreed to reinstall surveillance cameras inside the centrifuge component manufacturing workshop at the Karaj site.

Himachal Growers...

FROM PAGE 1

Consumers in the National Capital Region are complaining about "white insects" in kiwi fruit this year. Iranian kiwis are selling for ₹7 per piece in retail these days. "Codling moth infestation in apples is visible at Bihar and Bengal. Let common apple consumers get informed about this. It will be a huge step for the whole community," said a fruit importer from Ahmedabad, who requested anonymity.

Iranian apples are coming in non-recyclable plastic crates that pose double risk to the

environment. Russia has banned the import of Iranian apples following the high infection rate last year. Iran has witnessed a bumper crop of apples this year and the fruit is being dumped in markets in the country as the Union ministry has not yet banned the import.

Farmers say the unregulated import of infected fruits and plant material from Iran does not only pose a grave risk to the apple and kiwi industry of Himachal and Arunachal Pradesh, but also to the consumers across the country.

Mora Says...

FROM PAGE 1

The senior official said Iran and the P4+1 group of countries had reached "two new documents for talks both on the issue of sanctions and on the nuclear issue," referring to the bans that the US imposed on Iran after withdrawing from the deal and the retaliatory nuclear steps that Tehran took away from the accord.

He emphasized that the fresh round of Vienna talks would be based on these new texts which incorporate Iran's viewpoints and positions.

Iran's chief negotiator explained that the talks were paused on Friday because the two sides agreed on the basis of the future negotiations, noting that they would resume a fresh round with serious discussions on the texts which have been agreed upon by all the negotiating teams.

Iranian Drones...

FROM PAGE 1

Last month the Iranian army intercepted two U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles, which had penetrated Iranian airspace in an area where Iran was holding massive drills. They were sent on their way with a stern warning to stay away from the zone.



The ban imposed on the Iranian military drones comes amid ongoing talks over the removal of anti-Iran Sanctions between Tehran and the signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna.

The U.S. baselessly accuses Iran of conducting drone attacks in West Asia, while Washington has well documented blood on its hands, having killed thousands upon thousands of innocent civilians by conducting their own hypocritical drone and air strikes in the region.

Iran has proved in recent years that it is determined to advance its scientific and self-defense military programs and sanctions are unable to stop the country and what the U.S. does is something in vain and Iranians do not even give a damn to such approvals and bans of the U.S. and they have proved the world that if there is a will, there is a way and Iranians have proved their will for progress to make ineffective the U.S. bans.

Tehran is using the technology of drone in its civil sector and this is also another upset for the West that Iranians are gradually cutting their dependence to the West. There are several fields for taking advantage of the drones that Iran has tried to employ them.

According to reports, the use of drones in the Iranian farms has tripled this calendar year to nearly 460 units. Iran's agriculture ministry has said that it is encouraging the use of drones on farms across the country through offering cheap loans to farmers and launching information campaigns to boost the application of the technology.

Head of the ministry's Agriculture Mechanization Expansion Center said that demand and use of drones in the Iranian farms had risen three-fold since the start of the current calendar year in late March compared to the previous year.

The official said that 12 domestic companies have supplied 65 models and brands of drones for use in the Iranian agriculture sector, adding that the number of drones used in the farms has increased to reach nearly 460 units.

He also said drones are mostly used for spraying pesticide in the Iranian farms, adding that they have also been used to apply fertilizers, for pollination and for sowing seed in farms in remote regions.

This is just a simple example for using drone in the civil fields and Iran can expand its working on drone to improve this technology and make the world envy it.

So such unstoppable progresses can hurt the West and for this reason they have to resort to any tricks and pretexts as well as claims to stop Iran but Iran has set its doctrine in 1979 when the Islamic Revolution emerged and the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed, and the doctrine of the country is to rely on own capabilities and to cut dependence no matter what the West and its allies say because any progress and achievement in Tehran is like a thorn in the eyes of them and such nonsense bans and threats are in vein.

Iran Exports to...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the IRICA head, the weight of trade in the mentioned period also grew by 43.5 percent in comparison to the figure for the previous fiscal year.

The official put the eight-month non-oil exports at 83.7 million tons valued at \$31.1 billion, with a 42-percent rise in value and 10.5-percent growth in weight.

Mir-Ashrafi noted that petrochemical products accounted for 43 percent of the total value of the exports in the said time span, with 39.8 million tons worth \$13.3 billion of the said products being exported to foreign markets.

He said major export destinations of the Iranian non-oil goods were China, Iraq, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Afghanistan.

The official further announced that 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.

According to the IRICA head, out of the total non-oil goods imported into the country in the first eight months of this year, 20.3 million tons worth \$12.4 billion were basic goods, which accounted for 38 percent of the total value of the imports.

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

He has put the weight of non-oil trade at 146.4 million tons, and said that the figure shows a 25-million-ton annual decline, which is the result of sanctions and coronavirus pandemic.

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

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
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Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
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Pliskova out of Australian Open With Hand Injury

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Karolina Pliskova has withdrawn from next month's Australian Open and two warm-up tournaments because of a right hand injury sustained in training. Australian Open officials on Thursday confirmed the world fourth-ranked player's withdrawal, and said in a tweet: "wishing you a speedy recovery."

Pliskova had earlier said on social media "unfortunately I hurt my right hand in practice yesterday and I won't be able to play in Adelaide, Sydney and Australian Open this year."

Injured Dressen To Miss Olympics

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German downhill skier Thomas Dressen said he has lost his race against the clock to be fit for the Winter Olympics.

A five-time downhill race winner, Dressen has been recovering from surgery on his right knee following an injury which kept him out of most of last season as well. The 28-year-old has been in cross-country training, building up his strength again and had hoped to ski at Wengen and Kitzbuhel in a bid to qualify for the Olympics, which take place in Beijing in February.

Durant Carries Covid-Hit Nets to Win Over Sixers in NBA

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Kevin Durant finished with 34 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists as the short-handed Brooklyn Nets beat Joel Embiid's Philadelphia 76ers 114-105 on Thursday in New York.

Durant, the league's leading scorer, delivered a key four-point play with 1:46 remaining and the game tied.

"It's a challenge knowing how you're going to come in to the games because a lot of these teams, they scheme for me a little different," Durant said.

The first-place Nets were missing seven players because of Covid-19, leaving them with just nine players available for the game, played in front of a crowd of 17,000 at Barclays Center arena.

It was Brooklyn's second straight game without starters James Harden, LaMarcus Aldridge and DeAndre' Bembry, along with reserves Bruce Brown, Paul Millsap, Jevon Carter and James Johnson.

Blake Griffin and Nic Claxton each tallied a season-high 17 points while Patty Mills scored 14 as Brooklyn won their fourth straight.

The Nets had just eight players available for Tuesday's game against the Toronto Raptors. Brooklyn is being forced to implement a hardship exception to try and add players to the roster.

"We can all hoop," Claxton said of the reserve players being given bigger roles. "A lot of attention is going to KD (Durant) so we're just making plays."

Embiid had 32 points, nine rebounds and six assists in the 76ers' third straight loss. Seth Curry scored 29 points. Embiid was averaging 27 points coming into Thursday's contest.



The game was similar to Brooklyn's 114-109 win over the Sixers in October when Durant earned a triple double of 29 points, 15 rebounds and 12 assists.

Sixers coach Doc Rivers said they are toughening their Covid-19 protocols.

"We want to be the team with the least (cases)," said Rivers, who lost Embiid for a long stretch due to Covid-19. "We lead still, I think, in Covid games off. That one stretch was brutal for us and now other teams are going through it. So it's no fun."

In Phoenix, the first-place Suns used a balanced attack as eight players scored in double figures in a 118-98 lopsided win over the Washington Wizards.

JaVale McGee finished with 17 points and eight rebounds, Deandre Ayton added 15 points and 10 boards, Chris Paul had 12 points and six assists as the Suns won for the 22nd time in the last 24 games.

Phoenix also moved into a tie with the idle Golden State Warriors in the Western Conference standings with a 23-5 record.

Bradley Beal finished with 26 points for Washington, which has lost four straight.

In Indianapolis, Caris LeVert tallied a season-high 31 points as the Indiana Pacers handed the Detroit Pistons their 13th consecutive loss, 122-113.

Justin Holiday had 17 points, while Myles Turner contributed 16 points, seven rebounds and four blocks for Indiana.

Murray Relishing Nadal Reunion In Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Andy Murray said he is relishing the opportunity of facing Rafa Nadal for the first time in more than five years with the pair due to meet in Abu Dhabi.

Murray, 34, beat Dan Evans 6-3 6-2 on Thursday and will face Nadal for a spot in the final of the exhibition event — his first meeting with the Spaniard since the 2016 Madrid Open semi-final when the Scot won 7-5 6-4.

Nadal, 35, last competed in August and has spent four months on the sidelines with a foot injury. He also struggled with back problems earlier in the year.

"I think the last time we played was five or six years ago, it's a really long time. It shows the sort of struggles that I've been through for a few years, and him more recently. It'll be nice to play each other again," said Murray, who had hip surgery in 2018 and 2019.

"I want to be playing these guys in the biggest competitions again, that's something that motivates me ... Hopefully we can put on a good performance for a couple of old guys."

England Drawn With Italy and Germany In Nations League

NYON (Dispatches) - England were handed a tough draw for the 2022-23 Uefa Nations League after they were grouped alongside European champions Italy and Germany in the draw held in Nyon.

England beat Germany in the knockout stages of the Euros earlier this year but lost to Italy in the final in a penalty shootout at Wembley. England will also face Hungary, who they played twice in the World Cup qualifiers.

Nations League champions France were grouped with Denmark, Croatia and Austria, who gained promotion to League A in the last edition of the competition.

Runners-up Spain will play their Iberian neighbours Portugal, Switzerland and the Czech Republic.

Belgium, the world's top-ranked side, face the Netherlands, Poland and Wales. Belgium and Wales met twice in the World Cup qualifiers, while Wales also famously beat them at Euro 2016.

"The big one is Belgium. Off the back of a great performance against them last month, everyone will be talking about that," Wales manager Robert Page was quoted as saying by the BBC. Wales drew 1-1 with Belgium last month but lost the reverse fixture.

"They're an outstanding outfit but we've proved we're prepared to go toe-to-toe with them," added Page.

Scotland and Ukraine, who meet in the World Cup playoff semi-finals in March, will play each other three times next year after also being drawn in the same Nations League group.

Sweden, Ukraine, Iceland and Bosnia & Herzegovina were relegated to League B, while Wales, Austria, Hungary and Czech Republic were promoted as group winners in the last campaign.

The latest group stage will be wrapped up before the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, while the semis and final for the top-tier League A will be played in June 2023.

Bielsa Won't Quit on Troubled Leeds



LONDON (Dispatches) - Leeds manager Marcelo Bielsa has vowed not to quit the troubled Premier League club but admits he may not be safe from the sack during his side's dismal run.

Bielsa's side are five points above the Premier League's relegation zone after an embarrassing 7-0 hammering at Manchester City on Tuesday.

It was the joint-heaviest league defeat in Leeds' history and increased talk that Bielsa might walk away from Elland Road before he could be sacked.

Leeds have won only three league games this season -- a stark contrast to their impressive ninth-place finish in their first campaign back in the top-flight in 2020/21.

Asked on Thursday if he feared being dismissed, Bielsa said: "Do you think there's a coach that can't be sacked, who is unsackable? Do you think I'm so vain that I think I can't be sacked?"

"Do you think that after suffering a 7-0 defeat I can discard the instability? Of course the job of a coach is not stable. I don't have anything that makes me immune to that characteristic."

The 66-year-old, who masterminded Leeds' promotion to the Premier League after a 16-year absence, has no intention of leaving in the midst of the club's battle to avoid relegation.

"Of course I'm going to continue fighting until the end of the season. I always think that in adversity you have to fight," he said.

"I am going to fight until the end of the season without any doubts. I hope nothing happens that does not allow me to act on what I just said."

Bielsa has faced criticism from pundits but he remains hugely popular with most fans. Ahead of Saturday's visit from in-form Arsenal, Bielsa conceded this was his most difficult period at Leeds.

"It's the worst of all the moments I've had at Leeds," he said. "Of course, to lose 7-0 is not just another defeat."

Verstappen Collects F1 Trophy

PARIS (Dispatches) - Red Bull's Max Verstappen collected his Formula One world champion's trophy at a gala awards ceremony on Thursday and looked forward to fighting seven times title-holder Lewis Hamilton again next season.

His Mercedes rival, beaten this year on the last lap of the last race, did not attend the event at the Louvre museum in Paris. "It's my life goal achieved, so it sounds pretty decent," said Verstappen after being welcomed on stage as champion.

"Everything that comes next is just a bonus. I'm of course going to keep pushing, I'm going to be in F1 for a few more years but this has been an incredibly tough season," added the 24-year-old.

"It's been an incredible battle with Lewis, one of the greatest drivers ever in Formula One. I think we really pushed each other to the limit, sometimes over the limit ... I think in the end we really respect each other."

"I can't wait for next year to come back and for sure we're going to try again."

Speaking to reporters earlier, Verstappen recognised his Mercedes rival's suffering. Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff, who was also absent, had indicated some uncertainty over his disillusioned driver's future after last Sunday's finale in Abu Dhabi.

"I don't feel sorry but I can understand of course that it can be very painful," said Verstappen.

"But at the end of the day that's racing as well. You have to just keep fighting to the end and you know that in racing anything can happen."

"He also won a championship like that. So I think he can understand as well," added the 24-year-old, who overtook Hamilton at Yas Marina when a sudden change to the safety car procedure gave him a chance after it seemed he had none.



Chiefs Win Thriller Over Chargers in OT

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Travis Kelce scored a touchdown on a 34-yard catch and run as the Kansas City Chiefs beat the Los Angeles Chargers 34-28 in overtime to win their seventh consecutive game on Thursday night.

Kelce took a short cross pass from quarterback Patrick Mahomes and weaved his way into the end zone for the Chiefs, who widened their lead over the Chargers in the AFC West Division standings. Kelce posted a career-best 191 yards on 10 catches and scored two touchdowns.

"It don't get no better than that. My juices are going," Kelce said on the field after the game. "We always talk about energy and when we bottle this thing up and circle the wagons, I don't think nobody can beat us."

Mahomes finished 31 of 47 for 410 yards, with three touchdowns and one interception for Kansas City, who were coming off division wins over Denver and Las Vegas, holding each to nine points.

"The guys step up and showed that championship swagger they had a couple of seasons ago and now we got to keep it going," Mahomes said.

"Our defence made some big time stops for us. Then we turned it on in the fourth quarter and got the win." The Chiefs improved to 10-4 on the season while the Chargers dropped to 8-6. Kansas City has now won eight straight road games against the Chargers.

Chargers lost tight end Donald Parham early in the game after he was taken to hospital after hitting his head hard on the turf while trying to catch a pass in the end zone. The Chargers said later that Parham was in a stable condition.

Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert threw for 236 yards, going 22 of 38 with two touchdowns. Justin Jackson led the Los Angeles rushing attack, finishing with 86 yards on the ground.

