

Some 85 Percent of the Medical Equipment That Is Necessary for The Treatment of the Coronavirus Infected Patients Has Been Domestically Produced, an Official In Health Ministry Said Yesterday

# IRAN NEWS

Chief of the Political Bureau of Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas Lauded the Islamic Republic For Supporting Palestine, Expressing Confidence That Iran Will Soon Overcome the Coronavirus

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## Over 22,000 COVID-19 Infected Patients Recover in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry says 22,011 patients have so far recovered from the novel coronavirus and been discharged from the hospital.

The Iranian Health Ministry Spokesman, Kianoush Jahanpour, said on Sunday 2,483 new cases of coronavirus infections, including 151 new deaths, were confirmed in the country in the past 24 hours.

That brings to 58,226 the total number of infections. The death toll has also increased to 3,603.

Jahanpour said 4,057 patients are in severe conditions. The spokesman said 189,790 patients have been tested for the COVID-19 so far.

Official figures show the number of new infections has decreased for the seventh day in a row.

Meanwhile yesterday deputy health minister said authorities are seeking to stem the spread of coronavirus and at the same time cushion the economic blow from the epidemic.

Iraj Harirchi said the two objectives are hard to be achieved at the same time.

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## Official Blasts U.S. For Sabotage of \$5b Loan Bid From IMF

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said in a Twitter message on Sunday that U.S. sabotage of \$5 billion loan bid from International Monetary Fund to fight the coronavirus outbreak amounts to "Crimes Against Humanity".

Ali Shamkhani wrote in his tweet that sanctioning medical items is "an illegal act, an anti-human rights move, and [U.S. President Donald] Trump's open animosity with Iranian people".

"U.S.' opposing IMF's granting a loan to Iran to provide the necessary equipment to fight the coronavirus outbreak is real instance of crimes against humanity."

On March 12, Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif wrote in a tweet that the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Kristalina Georgieva had "stated that countries affected by COVID19 will be supported via Rapid Financial Instrument. Our Central Bank requested access to this facility immediately."

The EU has backed Iran in their requests for emergency funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help them fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Last week the IMF said it had allocated \$50 billion for countries struggling with the outbreak.

## Low-Risk Businesses To Resume Saturday



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

President Hassan Rouhani says low-risk economic activities, which have been suspended over the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, will resume from April 11.

In a Sunday address to the National Headquarters for Managing and Fighting the Coronavirus, Rouhani announced that medium- and low-risk businesses can recommence next week, except those in Tehran Province.

"Regarding low-risk economic activities and the businesses that are not high-risk, it was decided that they resume in the provinces on Saturday, April 11, while observing the protocols announced by Health Ministry," Rouhani noted.

Those activities, he added, will resume in Tehran Province on April 18 under similar health protocols and careful monitoring. He also announced its new decisions on the campaign against the epidemic.

President Rouhani said businesses can start work on April 11, 2020, adding, "As for low-risk businesses and economic activities which do not pose high risks, it was decided that they resume work in provinces [other than Tehran] on April 11 while observing protocols announced by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education," said the president.

He said the health protocols should be observed fully and that trade unions as well as the health ministry should monitor the enforcement of the protocols.

"If needed, the Basij Force can contribute to the monitoring work as well because we don't want economic businesses and activities to affect the health of the society, so all [health] protocols should be adhered to," the president added.

"In Tehran province, businesses can resume their activities on Saturday, April 18, 2020, and, again, the same health protocols should be observed and the required monitoring should be in place," he noted.

"The resumption of these activities does not mean that we have forgotten the stay-at-home directive, and those whose presence in the street and society is not essential had better stay home," he said.

"Our activities in the society should be minimized to the lowest necessary level," the president said.

The president noted that two-thirds of civil servants are required to go to work, and the remaining one-third can stay home. If you are worried that you may have contracted the Coronavirus, take this test right now.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president noted that economic activities and measures to preserve people's health are not mutually exclusive.

"Ill-wishers and anti-revolutionaries seek to create the impression that people have to choose between health and economic activities, but this is not true," he said.

"Both economic activities and health protocols can be implemented together," said the president.

President Rouhani also said that the "Smart Social Distancing Plan" was also discussed at the meeting.

President Rouhani underscored that although the coronavirus outbreak has negatively affected the society, it has had spin-offs as well, such as a reduction in traffic and air pollution and boosting national unity.

## PMU Anti-Terror Forces Vow to End U.S. Occupation of Iraq

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by their Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, have blasted the US forces based in their country as "occupiers", pledging to bring the occupation of the Arab country to an end.

In a joint statement on Saturday, Hashd al-Sha'abi groups said from now on the U.S. troops in the Arab country will be dealt with as "occupation forces".

The statement cited the U.S. refusal to withdraw its forces from Iraq and its "continued aggression" against the country as the reasons for their decision.

"You have proven to everyone that you are occupation forces and that you only respect the language of force; on these bases you will be dealt with as occupiers," the statement reads.

It also said that the Iraqi resistance forces' military operations are a basic response to the US aggression.

"Be aware that all operations which have been carried out against you so far were only a minor response to your aggressions as the decision to carry out operations [against US forces] had not been taken back then," it added.

They stressed that the recent U.S. threats to target the resistance forces are aimed at covering up their own failures.

The statement was signed by Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, Harakat al-Awfiyya, Saraya Ashura, Harakat Jund al-Imam, and Saraya al-Khurasani.

In late March, the other PMU group Kata'ib Hezbollah blew the lid off a plot by the US military to carry out massive aerial operations — backed by ground troops — against bases of the elite anti-terror force, which is currently busy helping the government in the fight against a new coronavirus pandemic.

An Iraqi resistance group has revealed a plot by the US military to exploit a coronavirus pandemic affecting the Arab country and launch attacks on PMU positions.

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## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



## Reflection of Post-Coronavirus In Disintegration of the West

Many experts in the world in recent decade have reached this conclusion that capitalism is on the verge of the collapse. Inspired by such expert opinions, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution almost eight years ago in his remarks stated, "The world is currently in a state of change. Global structures are changing." He then pointed to four signs of change in the global geometry, including Islamic Awakening, the U.S. failure in spreading its hegemony in the West Asian region, ambiguous future of European Union and decline of America's credibility.

We should take into consideration those signs mentioned by the Supreme Leader as four trends for development, and study their processes in pre- and post-Coronavirus eras. Definitely we will notice that the trend of religion-seeking identity and reliance on Islam has become upward and its signs can be apparently seen in spread of Islamic Awakening and achievements of the Resistance Axis in the region.

The U.S. three-layer plans, comprised of the Greater Middle East Project, New Middle East and proxy war for dominating the West Asia, have fully failed and the U.S. is now on the verge of expulsion from the region.

The trend of ambiguities in the political and philosophical future and worldview of western civilization has been accelerated in a way that even some western officials and theoreticians have acknowledged it. The Coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the pace of this trend and with a quasi-collapse in western economies, both Europe and the U.S., bubble capitals in many countries have been burst and dissipated.

The decline in credibility of world's giant economy in the West, namely, the U.S., has become evident and fast during President Barack Obama, especially in President Donald Trump's era. The U.S. has fully lost its capability in managing big currents. Europe is also in the same condition. After the Brexit and UK's exit from the EU, Polish President of the European Council Mr. Donald Tusk had interesting remarks about it which were welcomed by the media. Tusk said, "Brexit could be the beginning of the destruction of not only the EU but also Western political civilization in its entirety."

Post-Coronavirus has paved the ground for bankruptcy of Italy with over \$1600b debts. Except Italy, countries like Spain, Portugal and Greece, because of getting heavy loans from rich countries, will lose their saved assets and they will not be able to repay their debts. Symbols of unification and unity for reliance on segmenting the market like the World Trade Organization and the likes are all on the verge of collapse. The post-Coronavirus condition has put the identity and existence of Europe on the verge of collapse. The post-Coronavirus condition has engaged the U.S. with its hardest social, economic and political crises.

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## Russian Railways Pulls out of Iranian Infrastructure Work

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Railways confirmed that it had ceased work on infrastructure projects in Iran, and was to close its Tehran office.

As part of this, its overseas engineering business RZD International has ceased work to electrify and increase capacity on the 495 km route from Garmsar on the Tehran - Mashhad main line to Incheh Borun on the border with Turkmenistan. The work was being undertaken under a €1.2bn contract signed by RZD International and Islamic Republic of Iran Railways in March 2017, financed with a €1bn Russian export loan.

RZD declined to give reason for pulling out. However, it has been reported to have been concerned about US sanctions targeting entities involved in the Iranian construction sector, while the Incheh Borun project had been subject to prolonged negotiations and disputes over costs and priorities. RZD said it hoped that the end of its infrastructure activities would not affect its work with Iran's national railway in the field of international logistics, including the development of the North-South Transport Corridor to link Europe and India by rail and sea.



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# Border Guard Martyred in Saravan Region

ZAHEDAN (MNA) – An Iranian Basij border guard was martyred on Saturday in an armed clash with gunmen in an outlying border region in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan. The exchange of fire occurred between the smugglers and Iranian forces in the Bamposht region, near Saravan, bordering Pakistan, during which Basij Force member Esmail Ghalandarzahi was martyred. Armed clashes along the border areas of Sistan and Baluchestan, which neighbors Pakistan, are not rare. The Iranian Police are often engaged in battles against drug-traffickers and outlaws in the region.

## Tehran Hits Back at Pompeo Over His Remarks

*IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK*

**TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesman has lashed out at US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for accusing “Iranian diplomats” of involvement in an alleged “assassination” in Turkey last November.**

“Undisputed fact: U.S. “diplomats” have long been in the business of coups, arming terrorists, fueling sectarian violence, supporting narcotics cartels, bullying governments & companies, spying on even U.S. allies, flirting with dictators, butchers and terrorists, etc...,” Abbas Mousavi said in a tweet on Saturday.

However, Mousavi added, the U.S. secretary of state, who is a former CIA agent and also known as secretary of hate, and his masters have taken the “job” to a whole new level that is called “medical terrorism.”

“That’s why he has a conscience so filled with guilt that resorts to such psychological projection,” the Iranian spokesperson added.

Mousavi’s tweet came after Pompeo, President Donald Trump administration’s



most notorious Iran hawk, leveled the accusation in an earlier tweet, calling Iranian diplomats “agents of terror” who “have conducted multiple assassinations and bomb plots in Europe over the past decade.”

Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations also on Thursday reacted to Pompeo’s accusation and said nobody will be duped by Washington’s campaign of disinformation against Tehran.

Pompeo’s claims came amid pressures on the U.S. to lift unilateral and illegal sanctions it returned against Iran after leaving a UN Security Council-endorsed nuclear agreement with the Islamic Republic and other major powers -- Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany -- back in 2015.

## Third Generation of COVID-19 Test Kits to Be Produced

TEHRAN (MNA) – A high ranking official with the Iranian Ministry of Defense said that scientists of the body are working to produce the third generation of COVID-19 test kits.

The news comes as the body has already unveiled and mass-produced two generations of test kits in the past 40 days. “First-generation kits identified N gene; we have designed and produced the second generation of kits that were stronger regarding the detection ability. God willing, we will have the third generation of kits that will rely on Rdrp gene,” said Reza Allahverdi, head of the emergency and medical department of the ministry.

“We will have no problem for the production of test kits,” he highlighted. “The Defense Ministry’s duty in the first place is to provide defense equipment for the armed forces, however, given the scientific capacity of the body, we can address the needs of the country which is now happening during the COVID-19 outbreak.”

Last week, the ministry unveiled the second generation of test kits able to diagnose the COVID-19 disease in less than three hours and with 98 percent accuracy.

## Majlis to Investigate Coronavirus Economic Damages

TEHRAN (MNA) – Spokesman for the presiding board of the parliament announced on Saturday that the Parliament is to investigate the economic damages to the country due to coronavirus outbreak on Tuesday, in an open session which will be the first session in the new Iranian calendar year 1399 (started March 20, 2020).

According to Assadollah Abbasi, the presiding board will hold a session with economic commissions on Sunday to get the agendas prepared for the Tuesday session.

“On Tuesday, we will discuss the losses the country has incurred by coronavirus and will decide about policies for supporting low-come earner Iranians,” he said.

“Ministers of health and interior may also attend the Tuesday session,” he informed.

Abbasi added that on Wednesday, the Parliament will hold a session on evaluating the government’s introduced agriculture minister.

## 36 Foreign Tourists Under Control in Qom

QOM (IRNA) - Deputy Governor of Qom for political, security and social affairs said 336 Indian nationals who had traveled to Qom before the outbreak of coronavirus are now under control in two medical centers.

Bijan Soleiman-Pour hailed measures taken by the Qom governorate with regard to implementing the social distancing plan and fighting COVID19.

He said with coordination by Iranian Foreign Ministry and diplomatic mission, all these measures have been taken for free.

He added that from among 1,138 Indian nationals, 802 of them have returned to India in five stages and the 336 remaining ones are under control.

## Science Ministry to Support Researches in Fight Against Coronavirus

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology will back national and international researches in line with combating coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

Masoud Boroumand Deputy Ministry of Science,

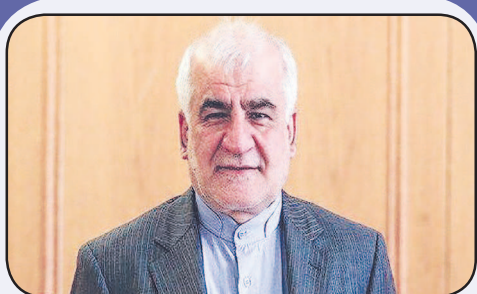
Research and Technology for Technology and Research Affairs in a separate letters sent to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and chancellors of the universities, higher education centers and IT parks announced, “National Supercomputer Network of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology will back all national and international researches in line with fighting against coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, and socioeconomic consequences of its spread.”

The text of the letter is read as follows, “while wishing health and wellbeing for all the noble nation of Islamic Iran and hoping to overcome problems caused by the outbreak of coronavirus, all researchers and academics are informed that the National Supercomputer Network will back all national and international researches in line with combating coronavirus and socioeconomic consequences of its outbreak wholeheartedly.”

This network will provide its software and hardware facilities to the researches related to the subject of coronavirus.

Hereby, all researchers and technologists, who need fulfilling calculations and advanced simulations for the removal of problems caused by coronavirus, are cordially requested to send their requests to the National Supercomputer Network of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology directly.

## Envoy Outlines China Anti-COVID19 Donations



BEIJING (IRNA) - Iran’s Ambassador to China Mohammad Keshavarzadeh in a Twitter message outlined the list of China donations to Iran for fighting coronavirus.

Keshavarzadeh said on Saturday night that two flights will ship Chinese donations from Beijing to Iran. He added that Chinese people and government’s contributions have so far been transferred by 28 flights from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Iranian diplomat said that the Chinese donations include over 10 million face-mask, 500,000 coronavirus test kits, 300,000 medical and isolation gowns, 2,200,000 pairs of gloves, 350 ventilators, 500 prefabricated hospital rooms, drugs and hospital equipment.

Keshavarzadeh noted that some flights will also carry donations of Chinese business magnate Jack Ma to Tehran.

Chinese people in less than 24 hours, donated half a million dollar to Iran for fighting coronavirus epidemic and called for launching a channel for collecting non-cash contributions.

Iranian embassy in China on March 5 released a message in ‘Weibo’ which is a leading social media in China and introduced a bank account for Chinese people’s cash contributions to fight COVID19 and people of China helped 4b Yuan (\$576,000).

In response to Chinese people memorable act, Iranian embassy in a message said Chinese people’s good-will “has impressed us and we now feel a heavy responsibility toward them.”

It added that aid provided by Chinese people will be spent for fighting coronavirus outbreak.

## Iran, EAEU Have \$1.5b Trade in 5 Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesman of the Iranian Customs Administration (IRICA) said on Saturday that after the implementation of the preferential trade agreement on 27 October 2019, the trade between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union reached \$1.5 billion during five months.

Ruhollah Latifi said the trade between Iran and the EAEU was 1,489,232,265 dollars, from which 67% has been Iran’s import and 33% export.

Latifi said export to the EAEU zone has been 1,159,479 tons with a value of 489,931,955 dollars, and the import from the zone has been 2,958,128 tons with the value of 999,300,310 dollars.

He added the preferential export of Iran to the EAEU zone has been 123,960 tons with a value of 136,260,229 dollars. And the preferential import has been 2,381,859 tons with a value of 749,816,205 dollars.

The biggest export market of Iranian goods has been Russia with 481,668 tons with a value of 248,555,102 dollars, which has been about 50% of all the trade with the EAEU. Armenia and Kazakhstan stand second and third with 24.6% and 16%, he said.

He added that the biggest EAEU exporter to Iran has been Russian with 2,007,981 tons of goods with the value of 713,706,799 dollars, which forms 71.4 percent of EAEU export to Iran. Kazakhstan and Belarus stand second and third with 24.9% and 2.3%.

He added Iranian export to the EAEU members was mainly fresh apples, fresh and dried pistachios, liquefied natural gas, fresh kiwis, cucumbers and fermented cucumbers; and the main preferential-tariff goods exported to the zone has been kiwis, fresh pistachio, dried grapes, lettuce, cauliflower, and broccoli. The main imported items from the EAEU zone have been barley, livestock corns, sunflower seed oil, meat, and newsprint.

## Iranians in Spain Seeking to Return

TEHRAN (MNA) – Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Spain issued an announcement regarding Iranians who want to return to their country from Spain after the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic.

“Given the situation caused by the outbreak of coronavirus in Spain and lack of a clear vision in the short term to solve the global crisis and its relevant problems, a number of Iranian citizens living in Spain, in their contact with the embassy, have pursued the possibility of using services and facilities for their return to the Islamic Republic of Iran,” reads the announcement.

To bring about wellbeing of Iranians living in Spain, the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Spain is trying to provide a charter Madrid-Tehran flight for bringing back Iranians who want to return to their home in cooperation with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) as well as receiving a permit from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant air transportation body.

In this announcement, it has been emphasized, “considering the issues related to the charter flights, planning in this field requires having enough and sufficient information on the statistics of applicants willing to return to Iran.”

## Tehran, Washington ‘Unnaturally’ Close to War

*IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK*

TEHRAN – A Majlis lawmaker has said war between the United States and Iran would be “injustice” to both countries because it would be instigated “by third party players”.

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh who previously headed parliament’s national security and foreign policy commission was known as a conservative politician but in recent months he has gravitated toward a more moderate position, closer to President Hassan Rouhani. He is not in the newly elected parliament and will vacate his seat by June.

In an interview with Iran-based Borna news agency, Falahatpisheh said that currently “Iran and America have unnaturally come close to war” and the main problem is, “they obtain information about each other indirectly, through third parties”.

Falahatpisheh did not name the third parties he referred to, but Iranian officials and politicians often accuse Israel and Saudi Arabia of fomenting existing tensions between Tehran and Washington.

## Path of Resistance to Continue Until Goals, Aspirations Realized

TEHRAN (MNA) – Top Adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati said that path of the Resistance will continue until the objectives and aspirations are materialized.

Hamas’ Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh in his phone conversation with Top Adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati late on Sat. congratulated the Iranian New Year and expressed his sympathy with the great nation of Islamic Iran in the fight against coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

While emphasizing the definitive victory of Palestinians and the liberation of Al-Quds, Haniyeh praised the positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran especially the Leader of the Islamic Revolution toward the oppressed nation of Palestine.

Hamas political leader endeared the name and memory of Martyr Gen. Soleimani who was assassinated by the US terrorist forces in Baghdad International Airport on Jan. 03.

For his part, Top Adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati thanked him [Ismail Haniyeh] for phone contact and hoped that problems facing Muslims and other countries as a result of the spread of coronavirus global pandemic will be resolved.”

Velayati also praised the effort of the Resistance groups who strive for realizing ideals and causes of Palestine and liberation of Al-Quds and added, “Al-Quds and Palestine belong to the Islamic world and will continue the path of Resistance until the realization of ideals and causes of Palestinian people.”







## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:48
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:15
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:41

47. And when they are told, "Spend ye of (the bounties) with which Allah has provided you," the Unbelievers say to those who believe: "Shall we then feed those whom, if Allah had so willed, He would have fed, (Himself)?- Ye are in nothing but manifest error."

Surah 36. Ya-sin (47)

## Granting Export Incentives The Only Way to Overcome Sanctions, Coronavirus

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Director of Economic and Investment Development Department in Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation (IMIDRO) believes granting incentives for exports is the only way to overcome the current sanctions and woes due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus.**

Speaking to IRNA, Mr. Amir Sabbagh said that today and in the sanctions era while the production units are affected by the Coronavirus, one of the options for boosting the economy is to grant incentives for exports especially in mining and mineral industries sector as a replacement for oil revenues.

He said in 2018, the country earned \$160 per ton for exporting minerals and the total value of exports stood at over \$9b and the country set the target for earning \$10b in 2019.

Sabbagh further said that companies in mining and minerals sector adopted necessary policies for their exports in the first quarter in 2019 and took action in pre-sale of their exports and they materialized their goals in steel, copper and some other sectors.

He noted that today exports are totally interlinked with existing conditions in transportation especially marine transportation, and exported consignment has to be quarantined for 14 days and it needs proper management by importers and exporters while air transportation has halted.

Sabbagh admitted that exports to Oman, while the cargo is to be quarantined for 14 days,



have no economic justification and with good management, currently expansion of exports to East Asia is on the agenda because there is no need for quarantine in port of embark and standardization in the port of departure can resolve the problem of transportation.

He said that it is predicted the effects of Coronavirus to show themselves in the exports sector after June and this needs a strong management and it is also expected the volume of exports to decrease.

He noted that this year has been named "production leap" and the country due to its huge capacities in mining and minerals sector should increase exports in terms of weight in order to avoid decline in terms of value.

Dabbagh noted that economic experts believe that with the current trend this year, the value of exports will drop between 10 to 15 percent comparing to last Iranian calendar year which ended on March 19 but with good management, the country can overcome this woe with the least problem.

He reiterated that the main factor for surge in production is to constantly monitor our rivals in the export markets and their production processes.

He stated that any damage on the trend of exports will show its effect in the rate of forex, hence, stability and boom in exports will show its positive impacts on the body of national economy.

## Iran to Produce 4m Face Masks Daily



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - As the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, Iran is to increase its production of protective face masks to 4 million a day in coming weeks, according to the Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Rahmani.

Iran's daily capacity for production of face mask was about to 700,000 before the outbreak of the pandemic when the country's output stood at 300,000 face masks a day, Rahmani said on Sunday, adding that the Iranian production units are now working round the clock.

He said that his ministry is taking all the measures under the protocols adopted by the Ministry of Health and is acting in coordination with the national headquarters for the fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

The minister also said that the country's production of washing liquids and alcohol have grown eight-fold and twenty-fold respectively in less than two months.

Production of protective gloves have more than doubled, Rahmani said, noting that the country used to produce some 2 million pairs of protective gloves a day before the outbreak of the disease while it is now producing 4.5 million pairs.

"All our productions are being handed over to the Ministry of Health and are being distributed under the supervision and control of the Ministry."

Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has supplied the Ministry of Health with 10 million protective face masks while nearly 20 million other face masks have been imported over the past few weeks, the minister said.

## Domestic Firm Awarded Contract to Produce Micro-CHPs

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Oil Ministry has awarded a major contract to a domestic company to manufacture micro-combined heat and power (CHP) systems as the country aims to increase efficiency in energy consumption.

Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zangeneh oversaw the signing of the contract on Saturday between the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) and Aran Energy Systems for production of 85 micro-CHPs in one year.

Micro-CHPs are gas boilers that produce electricity as well as heating and hot water. Experts see a bright future for the systems which are small-size versions of industrial heating systems that generate electricity as a by-product of heating.

The Iranian-made micro-CHPs are planned to be used for an initial period of six months in government offices and non-residential places. That could help the manufacturer to fix troubleshooting issues and reduce

the final price of the product for introducing to the households.

The Iranian version of the micro-CHPs will be equipped with modern overhead valve engines (OHV), said Jaber Neshati, an Iranian Oil Ministry official familiar with the process to commercialize the boilers.

Neshati said that the project for obtaining the

technology needed for micro-CHPs began in Iran in 2014 when the National Iranian Oil Company and the fuel efficacy department of the Oil Ministry provided the funding and support.

He said the total costs for manufacturing a micro-CHP in Iran would amount to nearly 7,000 euros, adding that once fully commercialized, the final price of the product would be around a fourth of the price of a current European version.

Studies suggest that by 2030, more than one in three heating systems sold in Europe could be a micro-CHP system.



## Salehabadi: Exports Should Be Production-Based

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – The CEO of Export Development Bank of Iran says all approaches in the country should be production and export-based and actually change in approach is very crucial.

Speaking on the prerequisites for surge in production this year, Dr. Ali Akbar Salehabadi said all should look at production as a sacred duty because production is the foundation of any economy.

He went on to say that production should be competitive and could be exported to the international markets, adding that on the whole production should be in a way that it both meets the domestic demands and competes with their rivals in the international markets.

Salehabadi further said as the maximum international pressures and sanctions have minimized Iran's oil exports, the country should provide its necessary earnings and forex via exporting non-oil goods.

He said developing non-oil exports in the current sanctions era is very crucial for the country, adding that to boost exports and for surge in production each organ and ministry has its own task and responsibility.

Salehabadi also said the banking system last year defined a new bond "Gam Bond" which is a new bond to provide necessary capital for production enterprises. He deplored that this issue has not been detailed and promoted in the country as it could play an effective role in boom in production sector.

He said "Gam Bond" is a plan which manages the liquidity and it has non-inflation impact on the economy for providing enough capital for the production chain.

He added that providing liquidity for producers in the raw material and production sectors will both lead to boom in domestic production and to provide condition for exports of Iranian goods to the international markets.



## Goods Loading, Unloading Operations Decline

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Loading and unloading operations of goods at Iranian ports have registered a 55 percent decline since the beginning of the current year [started March 20, 2020] up to the present time due to the spread of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

Outbreak of coronavirus and imposition of restrictions for transit of vessels and ships in borders of the country caused a significant 55 percent slump in loading and unloading of goods at ports as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

According to the statistics of the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), some 2.86 million tons of goods were loaded and unloaded in ports of the country from March 20 to April 4, 2020, showing a considerable 55.5 percent decline as compared to the same period of last year.

MPO also pointed out that loading and unloading operations in containerized sector, dry bulk, liquid bulk, general cargo and oil products have decreased 80, 40, 76, 70 and 52 percent respectively.

Some 6.41 million tons of goods were loaded and unloaded in ports of the country last year [ended March 19, 2020].

## Iran-UAE Trade Has Not Changed Significantly

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The bilateral trade between Iran and the UAE has not changed significantly," the chairman of Iran-UAE joint chamber of commerce Farshid Farzanegan said.

The Iranian official said "There is no problem in transporting cargo containers, especially fruit and vegetable products and minerals, and currently only air cargo facing some challenges."

He pointed to the return of Iranians and citizens of other countries from the United Arab Emirates and added that according to UAE Cabinet's decision all people holding any kind of UAE visas or residency will be exempted from any fines and all residency visas expiring on March 1, 2020, will be extended. According to reports, this move is part of a series of precautionary and preventive measures to limit the negative consequences of the coronavirus outbreak on various sectors in the UAE.

"UAE Cabinet decision means that the people with a valid UAE residency will be exempted from fines for a renewable period of three months without any additional fees upon renewal," he added.

The Iranian official said "Etihad Airways recently announced that it will start flights to six cities around the world on April 5 to repatriate foreigners inside the UAE."

On Twitter, Seyed Abbas Mousavi, an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, praised the UAE, as well as Uzbekistan and the United Nations' children agency, UNICEF, for their recent deliveries of medical supplies.

"My country is sincerely thankful for these humanitarian efforts and will never forget the way they stood with Iran in hard times," Mousavi wrote.

## 100% Output in Gas Platforms



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Project Director of Pars Oil and Gas Company Alireza Ebadi says the output of gas platforms under management of his directorate has been 100 percent and in compliance with the approved programs of the oil ministry.

Ebadi pointed to the safe and sustainable gas production in South Pars, stating that the output of the gas platforms has been fully materialized according to the schedule approved by the ministry.

He termed favorable the exploitation of gas from the active platforms of the company, adding that fortunately last year the output of gas exploitation from the platforms under management of his department surpassed 100 percent and currently it is in the safe and sustainable production condition.

He pointed to the management of 26 gas platforms in South Pars gas fields by the production and operation department, noting that some part of the current capacity of gas production in South Pars includes exploiting gas from those platforms and some part belongs to nine platforms of developmental projects whose process of handover to this management is underway.

Ebadi reiterated that the assigned gas production program has been materialized by registering over 6.4m man-hours of operation and logistic from the onshore and offshore staff of the company.

On safety measures regarding the outbreak of the Coronavirus, he said that the company observes all necessary measures for the safety of its staff, adding that the company acts based on the measures which have been taken and ordered by the oil ministry.

Ebadi reiterated that the company screens the health of its staff every day especially by holding different maneuvers on the platforms and Asalouyeh site.

## NIDC Drills 6 Wells in 15 Days

TEHRAN (Shana) – The National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) has spudded 6 oil and gas wells over the first 15 days of the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21.

According to the company, Director of Consolidated Planning of NIDC Babak Zangeneh said the wells included 2 development wells and 4 workover projects.

All the wells are in the fields operated by the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC).

NIDC enjoys 70 offshore and land drilling rigs.





## At Least 19 Killed in Mexico Gang Clash

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - A gang battle in Mexico has left at least 19 people dead in the northern state of Chihuahua, officials said Saturday.

At least five armed clashes have occurred in the Madera community so far this year, local authorities have said.

"The state attorney general, in conjunction with the public safety office and Mexican Army, launched an operation to investigate and locate armed groups that staged a confrontation that left 19 people dead yesterday in the town of Madera," authorities said. According to early reports, the bloodshed occurred Friday evening when alleged hitmen of the Gente Nueva group, part of the Sinaloa Cartel, were driving on a dirt road in Madera.



## Nearly 3,000 Released From Sri Lanka Prisons

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Nearly 2900 prisoners have been released from overcrowded prisons in Sri Lanka as the Indian ocean island nation has stepped up its efforts to contain the spreading of the new coronavirus.

Sri Lanka has been under a countrywide curfew since March 20. Five people have died due to the virus and the total number of confirmed cases have risen to 166.

According to a statement from the president's office, 2,961 prisoners have been released on bail since March 17.

Sri Lanka's prisons are highly congested, and the president's office said at present, there are more than 26,000 inmates while the normal capacity does not exceed 10,000.



## Global Virus Deaths Top 60,000



PARIS (AFP) - U.S. President Donald Trump has warned Americans to brace for a "very horrendous" number of coronavirus deaths in the coming days as the total number of global fatalities from the pandemic soared past 60,000.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States on Saturday surpassed 300,000, but Europe continued to bear the brunt of the pandemic which has left roughly half the planet confined at home at a huge cost to the global economy.

Over 45,000 of global deaths have been in Europe, with Britain reporting a new daily high in fatalities, taking the overall toll to 4,300 out of nearly 42,000 cases. Queen Elizabeth II was to make a rare, "deeply personal" speech on Sunday to urge people to rise to the challenge posed by the coronavirus, and personally thank frontline healthcare workers.

"I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge," she will say, according to extracts released Saturday.

There are now more than 1.2 million confirmed cases across the globe, and around 65,000 people have died since the virus first emerged in China late last year, according to a John Hopkins University tally.

Trump said the United States was entering "a time that's going to be very horrendous" with "some really bad numbers." "This will probably be the toughest week," he said at the White House. "There will be a lot of death."

At the same time, the president stressed the U.S. cannot remain shut down forever. "Mitigation does work but again, we're not going to destroy our country," he said. "I've said it from the beginning -- the cure cannot be worse than the problem."

The threat from mass gatherings was highlighted again this weekend, this time in Pakistan where authorities are trying to track down and quarantine tens of thousands of worshippers who attended a massive Islamic event last month. More than 150 people who attended have tested positive for the coronavirus so far, with two deaths. Foreigners from several countries also went to the event, which was held despite government requests to cancel it over virus fears.

There was some encouraging news from Europe over the weekend.

New York state, the U.S. epicenter, saw a record 630 deaths in a single day and Governor Andrew Cuomo warned the worst was yet to come. The state has recorded a total of 3,565 deaths. Cuomo also cautioned that already strained hospitals were not prepared.

New York City appealed for licensed medical personnel to volunteer their services. "Anyone who's not already in this fight, we need you," Mayor Bill de Blasio said. Trump said 1,000 military personnel, mostly doctors and nurses, would be deployed to help in the city, which he described as "the hottest of all the hot spots."

Trump also said he had asked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to expedite shipments of hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug which the US leader has been touting as a coronavirus treatment although clinical trials are still ongoing. "I may take it," Trump said. "I'll have to ask my doctors about that."

Several Western countries including the U.S., Germany and France have in recent days encouraged the use of masks in public despite earlier saying that only carers needed to cover their faces.

## France Launches Probe After Two Killed

PARIS (Dispatches) - A Sudanese refugee went on a knife rampage in a town in southeastern France on Saturday, killing two people in what is being treated as a terrorist attack.

The attack in broad daylight, which President Emmanuel Macron called "an odious act", took place with the country on lockdown in a bid to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

Counter-terrorism prosecutors have launched an investigation into "murder linked to a terrorist enterprise" after the rampage in a string of shops in Romans-sur-Isere, a riverside town with a population of about 35,000.

The assailant, identified only as Abdallah A.-O., a refugee in his 30s from Sudan who lives in the town, was arrested without a fight by police.

"He was found on his knees on the pavement praying in Arabic," the prosecutor's office said.

According to witnesses cited by local radio station France Bleu Drome Ardecche, he shouted "Allah Akbar!" (God is Greatest) as he stabbed his victims.



## Labour Turns Page on Socialism With Starmer as New Leader

LONDON (Reuters) - Keir Starmer was elected as the leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party on Saturday, pledging to bring an end to years of bitter infighting and to work with the government to contain the raging coronavirus pandemic.

Starmer, a former director of public prosecutions who was known for a forensic attention to detail when opposing the country's exit from the European Union, won with 56% of the vote.

The comprehensive defeat of an ally of the outgoing leader Jeremy Corbyn, and the election of Angela Rayner as Starmer's deputy, heralds the end of the party leadership's embrace of a radical socialism that was crushed in the December election.

Starmer, who takes over immediately, said he would work constructively with government when it was the right thing to do, while testing Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson's arguments and challenging the failures.

"Our purpose when we do that is the same as the government's, to save lives," he said in a statement that was pre-recorded due to the pandemic.

Starmer added that once the country emerges on the other side, once the hospital wards have emptied and the threat subsided, it would need to build a fairer society, where key workers on the front line receive decent salaries and better chances in life.

"In their courage and their sacrifice and their bravery, we can see a better future. This crisis has brought out the resilience and human spirit in all of us," he said.

Johnson said on Twitter he had congratulated Starmer and the two agreed on the importance of working together.

The party of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown endured its worst election performance since 1935 in December, when infighting over strategy, a confused policy over Brexit and allegations of unchecked anti-Semitism turned traditional voters away. Starmer pushed for a second Brexit referendum but said the election result had "blown away" that argument.

Corbyn ally Rebecca Long-Bailey came second in the party's vote with 28% and Lisa Nandy was third with 16%.

Many centrist Labour politicians celebrated the result as a sign that the government would finally face proper scrutiny.

"A fresh Labour leader will challenge the Tories where necessary and give the party the chance to renew itself in time for the next election," Alf Dubs, an opposition Labour lord who fled to Britain as a child to escape the Nazis, told Reuters. Starmer acknowledged the scale of the task ahead.

Starmer said he could not rule out further extensions, but said an easing of the strict regulations could be possible if the situation improves. About 50 arrived from Germany on Friday, after Spain appealed to its NATO allies. Another shipment was to be sent from Turkey but was eventually requisitioned by Turkish authorities.

## Spain to Extend Lockdown, As Deaths Down for Second Day

MADRID (AFP) - Spain's prime minister announced Saturday an extension of the country's lockdown to combat the coronavirus, saying the measures are "bearing fruit" as the number of deaths fell for a second day in a row.

A nationwide 15-day state of emergency was first announced on March 14 barring people from leaving home except for essential outings such as buying food or seeking medical care. It was to end on April 11 after being extended by two weeks.

"The cabinet on Tuesday will again ask for authorization from parliament to extend for a second time the state of alert until Saturday April 25 at midnight," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said in a televised speech.

The extra weeks are "the time that our health system needs to recover," he said.

Hospitals, in particular the intensive care units, have been overwhelmed by an influx of coronavirus patients.

However, Spain on Saturday recorded a second successive daily fall in coronavirus-related deaths

with 809 fatalities. The total number of deaths in the country stands at 11,744, second only to Italy.

The number of new Spanish cases also slowed to 7,026, taking the total to 124,736.

"We know that these three weeks of isolation are bearing fruit," Sanchez said. The confinement has allowed "a containment of the avalanche on the hospitals, the care of the sick and saved lives."

But to "ease up now would have a worse result," he said, warning of a "second wave" of infections.

"Yes, we are seeing a glimmer of hope," but "we are entering a new phase that will not be easy, the transition phase," said Dr Maria Jose Sierra of the health ministry's emergencies center.

Sanchez said he could not rule out further extensions, but said an easing of the strict regulations could be possible if the situation improves.

About 50 arrived from Germany on Friday, after Spain appealed to its NATO allies.

Another shipment was to be sent from Turkey but was eventually requisitioned by Turkish authorities.



## Italy's Intensive Care Virus Cases Drop For First Time

ROME (AFP) - Italy saw its first drop Saturday in the number of patients intensive care treatment for the coronavirus that had stretched the Mediterranean country's world-class healthcare system to breaking point.

Civil protection service chief Angelo Borrelli called the drop from 4,068 on Friday to 3,994 on Saturday in the number of critical patients an important moment in Italy's battle against COVID-19.

"This is a very important data point because the figure is decreasing for the first time," Borrelli told reporters.

"It is important because it allows our hospitals to breathe. This is the first time that this figure has fallen since we started managing the emergency," Borrelli also cast figures showing Italy's death toll rising by 681 to 15,362 -- officially higher than in any other country -- in a positive light.

"This figure is constantly decreasing," he said. "I want to remind you that (on March 27), we almost had 1,000 dead."

Italy recorded 969 deaths that day -- a record that stood until the United States reported nearly 1,500 fatalities between Thursday and Friday.

The daily rise in new infections across Italy has also slowed to just four percent. But Italian officials are still not declaring victory and instead are preparing the country for at least another month of life under a general lockdown.

The drop in critical care patients "is a strong signal but it should absolutely not be read as a sign that we have overcome the critical stage," the government's scientific council head Franco Locatelli said.

"It shows that the measures that we have been applying have had success."







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## Kuwait to Ramp Up Oil Output to 3.15m bpd

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) - Kuwait will ramp up oil output in April until it reaches about 3.15 million barrels per day, the state news agency KUNA reported, citing the chief executive of Kuwait Petroleum Corp. The increase in output will come from the Neutral Zone, an area Kuwait shares on the border with Saudi Arabia, KUNA said. Oil Minister Khaled al-Fadhel announced on Friday the resumption of crude shipments from the Neutral Zone for the first time in five years. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, both OPEC members, agreed last year to end a five-year dispute over the zone.



## Oil Crash Not Permanent, Mexico Sticks to Output

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexico will press ahead with oil investment and production plans, its energy minister told Reuters on Friday, arguing that a global crash in crude and fuel markets will be short lived and does not merit a change in strategy.

In the coming days, the government will offer investment opportunities in more of its mature oilfields and network of refineries owned by national oil company Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex), Energy Minister Rocio Nahle said in an interview. "Today we're in one of these phases where the price of oil is low, but this will not be permanent. Oil is a great business, the best in the world," said Nahle.

"We're going to wait, just like the rest of the world."

The administration of leftist President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is not considering reopening the auctions for exploration and production rights to oil and gas fields, she added, which are favored by many foreign companies.

A close confidant of Lopez Obrador, an energy nationalist who favors a stronger state role in energy, Nahle emphasized that the government was not planning to cut crude production from state-run Pemex, even at its most expensive oilfields, amid global benchmarks losing more than half their value last month.

"All producing countries are maintaining output levels... Pemex is also doing that," said Nahle, who also heads the Pemex board.

She also said there were no plans to suspend expensive infrastructure projects including the new \$8 billion Dos Bocas oil refinery currently under construction and a top priority for Lopez Obrador, who has repeatedly said he wants to wean Mexico off of imported fuels.

Heavily indebted Pemex has suffered 15 consecutive years of falling crude output despite relatively low lifting costs in its mostly offshore portfolio of projects. Its current crude production is more than 1.7 million barrels per day.

Later on Friday, Fitch Ratings downgraded Pemex's credit rating due to what it described in a statement as "the company's limited flexibility to navigate the downturn in the oil and gas industry."

Nahle, who implored ratings agencies to be more "responsible" with the grades they give the Mexican oil giant, emphasized that Pemex will decide which fields it would like private investment, but said those details will likely be unveiled at the weekend or next week. Mexico's national electricity company CFE will follow a similar tack, she added.

Producers of crude oil and refined products all around the world have already announced production cuts in reaction to lower demand due to the economic slowdown provoked by the coronavirus pandemic, in addition to growing difficulty finding space for storage.

## UK Among Economies Risking Record Slump

LONDON (Dispatches) - The coronavirus pandemic could trigger a global slump bigger than the Great Depression of the 1930s, a closely watched international survey suggests.

Manufacturing and services sectors in key geographical areas, including the UK, U.S. and the eurozone, saw record falls in activity during March, according to Purchasing Managers' Index data.

The UK figure, dropped from 53.0 in February to 36.0 in March.

The data is published by IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS).

Andrew Wishart, an economist at Capital Economics, said the PMIs were probably underestimating the scale of the economic fallout.

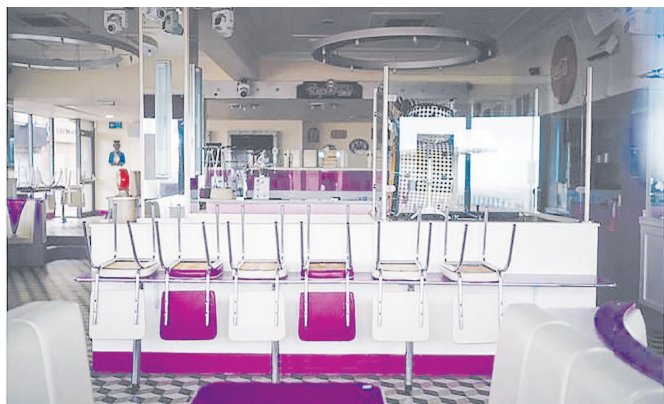
"We are forecasting a 15% fall" in economic output in the period from April to June, he said, "a larger fall in output than in the financial crisis or the Great Depression," he said.

"It's increasingly difficult to find the words to describe the devastation as every region in the world fights to save human life as the first priority," said Duncan Brock, CIPS group director.

"The likelihood of a global recession is now a given, though its duration and severity has yet to reveal itself."

The composite figure for the manufacturing and services sectors in the eurozone was even worse, down from 51.6 in February to 29.7.

"Confidence about the future was the lowest recorded by the survey since data were first available in July 2012," said IHS Markit.



## IMF Sees Coronavirus-Induced Global Downturn Way Worse Than Financial Crisis

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The coronavirus pandemic has brought the global economy to a standstill and plunged the world into a recession that will be "way worse" than the global financial crisis a decade ago, the head of the International Monetary Fund said, calling it "humanity's darkest hour."

The IMF's managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, speaking at a rare joint news conference with the leader of the World Health Organization (WHO), called on advanced economies to step up their efforts to help emerging markets and developing countries survive the economic and health impact of the pandemic.

"This is a crisis like no other," she told some 400 reporters on a video conference call. "We have witnessed the world economy coming to a standstill. We are now in recession. It is way worse than the global financial crisis" of 2008-2009.

World Bank President David Malpass echoed her outlook in a post on LinkedIn, writing, "Beyond the health impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are expecting a major global recession."

More than 1 million people worldwide have been infected with COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, and more than 53,000 have died, a Reuters tally showed on Friday.

Georgieva said the IMF was working with the World Bank and WHO to advance their call for China and other official bilateral creditors to suspend debt collections from the poorest countries for at least a year until the pandemic subsides. She said China had engaged "constructively" on the issue, and the IMF would work on a specific proposal in coming weeks with the Paris Club of creditor nations, the Group of 20 major economies and the World Bank for review at the annual Spring Meetings, which will be held online in about two weeks.

In his posting, Malpass said a debt standstill could begin on May 1, providing added liquidity for the poorest countries as they battle the disease. During the suspension period, he said, the World Bank and the IMF could evaluate the sustainability of those countries' debt and the possible need for a debt reduction by official creditors and commercial creditors.

Emerging markets and developing economies have been hard hit by the crisis, Georgieva said, noting that nearly \$90 billion in investments had already flowed out of emerging markets, far more than during the financial crisis. Some countries are also suffering from sharp drops in commodity prices.

## Singapore to Waive Foreign Worker Levy

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - The government will waive the foreign worker levy for April and further enhance the Jobs Support Scheme, in a move to boost support for businesses during a month-long "circuit breaker" to stem

the COVID-19 pandemic, said Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat.

In a Facebook post on Saturday (Apr 4), Mr Heng said the Government remains committed to protecting jobs and called on companies to "hold on" to their workers.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and the COVID-19 multi-ministry task force announced on Friday new sweeping measures, including closing schools and most workplaces, as well as disallowing dining in at food establishments.

The move came amid a rise in the number of daily new COVID-19 cases, as well as local transmissions and clusters. Singapore reported 65 new infections on Friday, taking its total to 1,114 cases and six deaths.

"We are implementing these painful but necessary measures to protect lives. The stronger the measures we adopt, the bigger the disruption and costs on businesses," said Mr Heng.

He said that he "understands" the worries of companies, who he said were likely looking at their cash flow and working out alternative arrangements over the weekend.

"This is undoubtedly a difficult month for many businesses. Additional help is on the way," said Mr Heng.

"I hope that businesses can tide through this month, hold on to your workers, and resume activities once the circuit breaker is lifted. Together, we can pull through this crisis," he added.

The further support comes after Mr Heng, who is also the finance minister, unveiled a S\$48 billion Resilience Budget on Mar 26 to help workers and businesses as well as strengthen economic and social resilience.

In his initial Budget announcement on Feb 18, the minister had already pledged S\$4 billion to measures aimed at stabilising the economy amid near-term uncertainties caused by COVID-19.

## World Bank Sees Pakistan's Economic Growth Sliding to 1%

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's economic growth may slip to nearly 1% — the situation that the country went through at the time of the last severe global financial crisis — because of the adverse effects of the novel coronavirus outbreak on the manufacturing and services sectors, the World Bank said on Friday.

The global lender also said the country's budget deficit would further widen by 2% of its GDP. This means that the budget deficit gap between income and expenditure will be close to 10% of GDP as against the pre-coronavirus estimates of 7.6%.

The Washington-based lender on Friday approved a \$200 million loan to support the country's efforts against the viral outbreak and said it was in talks to divert up to \$1 billion more out of the \$6.5 billion already reserved for Islamabad.

The local office of the WB shared a fresh economic assessment in a video conference, addressed by Country Director Illango Patchamuthu and his team.

Shabih Ali Mohib, the WB program leader on equitable growth, finance and institutions, said the current situation caused by the pandemic would continue for over next six months, meaning that the last quarter of the ongoing fiscal year (April-June) 2019-20 and the first quarter of the next fiscal year 2020-21 would be affected.

"Due to the steep decline in economic activity since March, we are revising our real GDP growth projection to 1.1% of GDP, from an earlier projection of 2.4% for this fiscal year," he added.

The drivers for this slowdown are the services and the manufacturing sectors that contribute 80% to total economic activities.

Shabih further said the WB expected the COVID-19 pandemic to abate over the next six months and a gradual recovery thereafter over the rest of the year.

"Therefore, we have revised our projection for fiscal year 2020-21 to only 0.9%, from the earlier 3%."

It will be lowest economic growth rate in over a decade. The last time was in the fiscal year 2008-09 when the country had recorded a growth rate of only 0.4% after the world was hit by a severe financial crisis.

The WB's economic impact estimates are steeper than the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the official projections. Despite the outbreak, the ADB projected the country's economic growth at 2.6% in its latest publication also released on Friday.

Shabih noted there would be an increase of 2% of the GDP in the fiscal deficit because of a reduction in revenue collection and additional fiscal needs to reach out to people being affected by the outbreak.

## Turkey's Financial Stress Intensifies in Credit Markets



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's sovereign debt is now more expensive to insure than it was during a currency crisis in 2018, reflecting the financial stress the country is under as the coronavirus dramatically slows economic activity.

Investors are turning to credit default swaps (CDS) to trade in Turkish risk after successive interventions by the central bank and state-run banks to defend the lira distorted the value of the embattled currency.

The cost of Turkish five-year CDS, which induces investors against the government failing to repay its bonds coming due, increased by 2.8 percent to 616.84 basis points on Friday. It peaked at about 550 basis points at the height of the currency crisis. The seller of the swaps is making a charge based on the value of the buyer's bond holdings annually in order to safeguard interest and capital on the investment.

While Turkey has never defaulted on its debts, the cost of the insurance has more than doubled from 238.29 basis points at the start of February, when better prospects for economic growth and financial stability in the country gave investors the confidence to buy Turkish bonds.

CDS is normally bought by bondholders when they fear the seller could default. Like several other emerging markets and so-called 'frontier economies' such as Sri Lanka, Honduras and Tunisia, Turkish bonds are rated as 'junk' by credit ratings agencies Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch.

Fitch warned last month that Turkey's high indebtedness - with around \$170 billion in short-term private and public sector debt payments due this year - made it particularly vulnerable to global market fluctuations.

The cost of Turkey's CDS has surged from 407.7 points on March 11, when the government announced the first case of the coronavirus. In comparison, Greek CDS stood at 173.3 basis points this week, Brazil 327.8 points, Russia 163.7 basis points, China 59.1 basis points and Germany 10.1 basis points.



## Over 87,000 Smuggled Fuel Seized

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Police Chief of Sistan and Baluchestan province said on Saturday that some 87,000 liters of smuggled fuel were seized in the past week.

Police Chief of Sistan and Baluchestan Second Brigadier General Mohammad Ghanbari noted

that police forces aim to identify fuel smuggling gangs in the province.

Over 86,000 liters of smuggled diesel fuel and 1,000 liters of gasoline have been confiscated in the past week, he added. Six cars and nine offenders were also busted and handed over to the judiciary.



## World Food Prices Fall Sharply in March



surging global demand and as processing facilities were hampered by the restrictions on the movement of workers.

FAO's forecast for 2020 world wheat production remains unchanged from the previous month, at the near-record level of last year, which, coupled with ample inventories, will help shield food markets from turmoil during the coronavirus storm.

In this month's "Cereal Supply & Demand Brief," also released today, FAO hiked its estimate for worldwide cereal output in 2019 to 2.721 billion metric tons, a 2.4% increase from 2018. By type, FAO's 2019 estimates now stand at 1.445 billion mt for coarse grains, 763 million mt for wheat and 512 million mt for rice (milled basis).

While localized disruptions, mostly due to logistical issues, pose challenges to food supply chains in some markets, their anticipated duration and magnitude are unlikely to have a significant effect on global food markets, FAO said.

FAO's 2020 forecast for world wheat production is unchanged from last month at 763 million mt, with expectations for lower outputs in the European Union, Ukraine and the U.S. compensated by anticipated production gains in the Russian Federation, India and Pakistan -- although locust infestations in the latter two countries could temper the foreseen increase.

For maize, the leading coarse grain, bumper harvests are expected in Brazil and Argentina, and South Africa's maize output is projected to recover strongly after last year's drought. Elsewhere, sowing decisions may be influenced by the downturn in international maize prices.

FAO has raised its forecast for world cereal utilizations for 2019-20 slightly to 2.722 billion mt, a 1.2% annual increase. World cereal stocks at the close of the 2020 seasons are expected to contract by 8 million mt from their opening levels, pushing the global cereals stock-to-use ratio down to 30.7%, which is still considered a comfortable level. World trade in cereals is projected to increase by 2.3% from the previous year to reach 420 million mt.

### Reflection of Post-Coronavirus...

FROM PAGE 1

The Instagram page of Forbes magazine wrote that Donald Trump as a big-earner financier has lost one-third of his capitals worth one trillion in just 20 days. Israel and the U.S. have started mulling an escape-forward game to avoid their collapses.



Zionist regime's missile attacks on Syria is a proof for it. The provocative flights of the U.S. fighter jets in Iraq's sky also show this belief that organizing the public opinion in western countries has lost its control, and independence-seeking layers in Europe and the U.S. are on the rise. And this means west's hegemony has fully cracked and it seems even escape-forward game is unable to come to their rescue. Of course, we should predict that if the U.S. commits another mistake in Iraq or in the region, it will accelerate its expulsion from the region. The consequences of assassinating Martyr Qassem Soleimani, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and his comrades will force the U.S. to leave the West Asia like what their British predecessors did after the World War II and left the region.

Now and regarding the Supreme Leader's predictions, today and even less than 10 years after his remarks, we are observing some signs of this development. God Almighty has promised that the leaders of power and wealth will be replaced with Salehin (the righteous) and who is more Saleh (righteous) than Imam Zaman (A) to deserve it.

### Over 22,000 COVID-19...

FROM PAGE 1

disease and bring down the fatality and infection rate; the other goal is to mitigate the economic and social fallout from the virus," he said.

"The key point is that these two objectives are mutually exclusive, and it is not possible to achieve both goals at the same time," he noted.

"What is important is that our objective is to enforce social distancing, which means reducing contact among people; however, we should see to what extent our economy can bear it because Iran is fighting not only coronavirus, but also sanctions," the deputy health minister said.

He also thanked people for their cooperation while implementing the social distancing plan.

"People's ongoing cooperation with regards to the social distancing program has been exceptional," urging them to keep maximum social distance.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official noted that the infection rate in most provinces across the country has been on the decline, but "this does not mean the disease has been controlled and contained."

"We are still concerned about coronavirus. Traffic levels in Tehran today worried us, and these people can carry the virus home or to their workplace," the deputy health minister underlined.

### PMU...

FROM PAGE 1

The PMU statement was concluded with a message to the Iraqi people, in which the resistance groups vowed that they will not let the US occupy the country and rob its resources.

The statement comes in line with earlier calls by the Iraqi Parliament and military for all foreign troops to leave the Arab country as soon as possible.

Iraqi lawmakers unanimously approved a bill on January 5, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country following the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the PMU, and their companions in a U.S. airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport two days earlier.

## India Seeks \$6b of Loans To Fight COVID-19



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's top rice shippers are convinced the government won't follow other nations in adopting restrictions on grains exports as the country has more than enough supplies to meet domestic demand.

Record harvests mean rice production will climb to 117.47 million metric tons in 2019-20, while wheat output may rise to an all-time high of 106.21 million tons, according to the farm ministry. Bumper crops will help the nation avoid curbs on overseas sales, according to some of the country's key exporters.

As the coronavirus continues to spread across the world, panic buying and concerns over supply chain disruptions have led several countries including Vietnam, Russia and Kazakhstan, to stop exporting some staple foods to shore up supplies at home. That's raised questions over whether India, the world's biggest exporter of rice, will follow suit.

"India is not deficient in production and, in the immediate foreseeable future, there does not appear to be a cause for concern over food security," said Vijay Setia, director at Chaman Lal Setia Exports Ltd., a rice miller and exporter. "We may have sufficient surplus for exports."

Continued shipments of rice from India may cool prices and stop consumers from panic buying. Vietnam, the world's third-largest shipper, has temporarily suspended new rice exports, while Myanmar also said it may cut overseas sales to avoid domestic shortages.

Fears of shortages have helped prices of Thai white rice 5% broken, an Asian export benchmark, surge more than 25% this year to \$564 a ton on Wednesday, the highest since 2013. Rough rice futures in Chicago are around the strongest for almost six years.

Demand for Indian basmati rice, an aromatic grain used in dishes such as biryani and pilaf, has increased recently, mainly from the U.S. and Europe, according to Ashwani Arora, chief executive officer of LT Foods Ltd. There may also be an increase in demand from Middle Eastern countries, he said.

## WHO Warns Middle East Must Act Quickly to Contain Coronavirus

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Middle Eastern governments must act quickly to limit the spread of the coronavirus as cases in the region have risen to nearly 60,000 - almost double the tally of a week earlier, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned.

"New cases have been reported in some of the most vulnerable countries with fragile health systems," Ahmed al-Mandhari, WHO's director for the Eastern Mediterranean region, which includes Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as MENA countries, said.

"Even in countries with stronger health systems, we have seen a worrying spike in the numbers of cases and deaths reported," al-Mandhari said in a statement.

Outside of Iran, which has reported more than 50,000 cases, coronavirus numbers have been relatively low in the Middle East and North Africa compared to Europe, the United States and Asia.

But health officials fear cases of the highly contagious respiratory illness, COVID-19, are under-reported. They say many countries with weak governments and health systems eroded by conflict will struggle to cope.

"I cannot stress enough the urgency of the situation," said al-Mandhari. "The increasing numbers of cases show that transmission is rapidly occurring at local and community levels. "We still have a window of opportunity, but this window is slowly closing day by day."

The total number of cases in the region has risen to 58,168 from 32,442 on March 26, the WHO said, on a day when global COVID-19 cases crossed the one million mark.

To date, 1,016,534 people have been infected globally, with 53,179 deaths.

One of the countries worst affected by conflict is Yemen, where the World Bank said on Thursday it would provide



\$26.9m in emergency funding to help the WHO and local authorities improve capacity for detecting, containing and treating the coronavirus.

Yemen has not confirmed any coronavirus cases but is seen as especially vulnerable because a five-year civil war has brought its health system to the brink of collapse and has created one of the worst

man-made humanitarian disasters in the world.

The country has already been struggling with overlapping infectious diseases including cholera, diphtheria and dengue fever, and large numbers of people have been displaced in the ongoing conflict.

About 24 million of its population of 29 million need humanitarian assistance. There are no doctors in 18 percent of the country's districts, most healthcare workers have not been paid for at least two years, and COVID-19 testing kits are available for just 600 people, according to the World Bank.

"The epidemic does pose unique public health risks in Yemen ... given the already weak health system and the high vulnerability among the population," said Marina Wes, the bank's country director.

Meanwhile, the United Nations warned on Friday that health care facilities in war-torn Libya - another vulnerable country ravaged by conflict - were already fragile as the country recorded its first death from the virus.

The UN-recognised, Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), which controls the west of the country, has officially recorded 10 cases of the virus in Libya.

"The ongoing conflict has severely impacted the country's health system and medical services, which have limited financial resources and face shortages of basic equipment and medicines," UNHCR spokesman Babar Baloch said.

## Coronavirus Pandemic Could Have Been Prevented

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The coronavirus crisis could have been prevented because there was enough information available to the world, according to Noam Chomsky, who has warned that once the pandemic is over, two critical challenges will remain - the threats of nuclear war and global warming.

Speaking from his office in self-isolation to Croatian philosopher and author Srećko Horvat, the celebrated 91-year-old U.S. linguist offered a stark perspective on how the pandemic has been managed by different countries. "This coronavirus pandemic could have been prevented, the information was there to prevent it. In fact, it was well-known. In October 2019, just before the outbreak, there was a large-scale simulation in the United States - possible pandemic of this kind,"

he said, referring to an exercise - titled Event 201 - hosted by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in partnership with the World Economic Forum and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"Nothing was done. The crisis was then made worse by the treachery of the political systems that didn't pay attention to the information that they were aware of. "On December 31, China informed the World Health Organization (WHO) of pneumonia-like symptoms with unknown origins. A week later, some Chinese scientists identified a coronavirus. Furthermore, they sequenced it and provided information to the world. By then, virologists and others who were bothering to read WHO reports knew that there was a coronavirus and knew that had to deal with it. Did they do anything? Well yes, some did.



## McLaren to Be Allowed To Make Chassis Changes

LONDON (Reuters) - McLaren will be allowed to make chassis changes in 2021 to accommodate the switch from Renault engines to Mercedes even though the sport has decided to keep this year's cars for another season. The Woking-based team are the only ones undergoing a change of engine provider at the end of 2020.

Formula One announced this month that it was postponing until 2022 planned major rules changes for 2021 "due to the currently volatile financial situation" caused by the coronavirus.

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## Halep Can Win Wimbledon for Two Years

LONDON (Reuters) - Simon Halep is trying to look on the bright side regarding the suspension of the tennis season due to the coronavirus pandemic, which means at least she will be referred to as reigning Wimbledon champion for two years.

The Romanian former world number produced a flawless performance to beat Serena Williams in last year's final but this week's cancellation of the grasscourt Grand Slam means she will not get to defend her title this summer.

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SPORTS

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# Bryant Heads 2020 Hall of Fame Honorees

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Five-time NBA champion Kobe Bryant headed a star-studded list of honorees named to basketball's 2020 Hall of Fame on Saturday.

The Los Angeles Lakers icon, who died in a helicopter crash in January, was named alongside nine honorees who will be enshrined at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on August 29.

Joining Bryant in the sport's pantheon are three-time NBA Finals MVP Tim Duncan, 15-time NBA All-Star Kevin Garnett, two-time NBA champion coach Rudy Tomjanovich and four-time Olympic medallist Tamika Catchings.

Other inductees include three-time NCAA National Championship coach Kim Mulkey, college basketball coach Barbara Stevens and longtime FIBA executive Patrick Baumann, who died of a heart attack in 2018 at the age of 41.

"The Class of 2020 is undoubtedly one of the most historic of all time and the talent and social influence of these nine honorees is beyond measure," said John Doleva, chief executive of the Hall of Fame. "In 2020, the basketball community has suffered the unimaginable loss of iconic figures Commissioner David Stern and Kobe Bryant, as well as the game itself due to COVID-19."

"We have also banded together like never before in appreciation of the game and those who have made it the uniting force it is today."

The basketball world was left stunned by Bryant's death earlier this year, with the crash also claiming the life of his daughter Gianna and seven others.

## Burnley Could Run

## Out of Money by August

LONDON (Reuters) - Premier League Burnley could run out of money by August if the season does not resume by then, club chairman Mike Garlick said on Saturday, three weeks after the COVID-19 pandemic forced a suspension.

In a statement on their website Burnley said they stood to lose up to 50 million pounds in revenue if the Premier League was not completed.

On Friday the Premier League said the current campaign had been postponed indefinitely and would only resume when it is "safe and appropriate to do so".

"The fact of the matter is if we don't finish this season and there isn't a clear start date for next season we as a club will run out of money by August, that's a fact," Garlick told Sky Sports. "I can't speak for other clubs."

"That's why we are very, very determined that when it's safe to do so we really do want to finish this season."

"Finishing the season is the only real outcome for all the Premier League clubs." Burnley expect to lose five million pounds in match-day revenue as their remaining home games will likely be played behind closed doors should the league resume.

In addition, if the season is cancelled altogether, the club will miss out on 45 million pounds in "broadcasting revenue and other items", Burnley said in a statement here on their website.

"It's a completely unprecedented situation that we and other Premier League clubs face and which we could not have foreseen in any way only just a few weeks ago," Garlick said.

"It's now not just about Burnley or any other individual club anymore, it's about the whole football ecosystem from the Premier League downwards and all the other businesses and communities that feed from that ecosystem."

Burnley said they were releasing the figures to be "transparent with supporters, staff and stakeholders".

The country's soccer authorities were in talks on Saturday to discuss a proposed 30% reduction in players' wages.

The NBA season has also been left in disarray by the coronavirus pandemic, with the campaign halted indefinitely last month and the league currently on hiatus.

Bryant's wife, Vanessa, told ESPN her late husband's posthumous elevation to the Hall of Fame ranked as one of his greatest career milestones. "It's an incredible accomplishment and honor, and we're extremely proud of him," Vanessa Bryant said.

"Every accomplishment that he had as an athlete was a steppingstone to be here," she added. Lakers team owner Jeanie Buss saluted Bryant in a statement that praised the star's fierce competitiveness, work ethic and drive.

"Those qualities helped Kobe lead us to five titles -- and have now brought him to the Hall of Fame, where he will be enshrined with the greatest to have ever played the game," Buss said.

"No one deserves it more."

Meanwhile four-time Olympic gold medallist Tamika Catchings, coaches Eddie Sutton, Rudy Tomjanovich, Kim Mulkey, Barbara Stevens and longtime



Swiss FIBA executive Patrick Baumann, who died in 2018, also were selected and will be enshrined in the Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts on Aug. 29.

Bryant was a five-time NBA champion with the Los Angeles Lakers and earned Olympic gold medals in 2008 and 2012.

Duncan, a 15-time NBA All-Star, also was a five time NBA champion with the San Antonio Spurs where he played for 19 years.

Garnett, a 15-time All-Star, drew acclaim for his rebounding and defensive ability with the Boston Celtics and Minnesota Timberwolves.

Catchings was a 10-time WNBA All-Star during her 14-year career with the Indiana Fever. Sutton was the first college coach to lead four different teams to the NCAA Tournament.

Tomjanovich spent 34 consecutive seasons with the Houston Rockets as a player, assistant coach and then as head coach from 1992-2003.

Mulkey led Baylor University to three women's collegiate titles and Stevens coached Bentley University to 22 25-win seasons and 10 trips to the Division II Fab Four, including a national championship in 2014.



## Kaka Picks Messi Over Ronaldo

MADRID (Dispatches) - Kaka labelled Lionel Messi a "genius" as he picked the Barcelona superstar over Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo.

Messi -- winner of a record six Ballons d'Or -- and Ronaldo are regarded as two of the greatest ever players, with debate often centred on who stands alone atop the all-time list.

Kaka played alongside Ronaldo at Real Madrid, but the 2007 Ballon d'Or winner selected Messi as his preferred choice.

"I played with Cristiano and he's really amazing, but I'll go with Messi," Kaka said when asked who he would pick out of Messi or Ronaldo during an Instagram Live Q&A for FIFA's channel.

"He's a genius, a pure talent. The way he plays is incredible."

But on five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo, Kaka added: "Cristiano is a machine. It's not just the way he's strong, powerful and fast; he's strong mentally."

"He always wants to win and play. To be the best. For me, that's the most incredible thing he has."

"In the history of sport, they [Messi and Cristiano] are definitely in the top five. We are very lucky to have been able to see both of them."

## Ex-Pakistan Cricket Great Says Spot-Fixers Should Be Hanged

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Cricketers involved in match fixing should be hanged, former Pakistan batting great Javed Miandad suggested Friday.

Match-fixing and spot-fixing -- determining the outcome of a specific part of a game rather than the overall result -- have stained the country's sport for several years.

"Players who are involved in spot-fixing should be severely punished," Miandad, who scored Pakistan's second-highest Test runs with 8832, said on his YouTube channel.

"Spot-fixers should be hanged because it is similar to killing someone, and so the punishment should also be on the same lines. An example should be set so that no player even thinks about doing something like this."

His remarks follow player Mohammad Hafeez's protests over former opener Sharjeel Khan's return despite receiving a five-year ban in 2017 over a spot-fixing case.

Meanwhile, Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal faces a ban of six months to life after being charged for not reporting a fixing offer last month, a crime under Pakistan Cricket Board's anti-corruption code.

Fixing was exposed in 1995 after Australians Shane Warne, Tim May and Mark Waugh alleged then-skipper Salim Malik offered them bribes to under-perform in matches.



## Liverpool Blasted Over Virus Furlough

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool were accused of betraying their "morals and values" on Saturday for their move to furlough non-playing staff during the coronavirus pandemic as Premier League stars warned of a £200 million (\$245 million) shortfall in government coffers if 30 percent wage cuts were introduced.

Premier League leaders Liverpool said they would top up the public money made available from the government to ensure staff on temporary leave received their full salaries.

It follows similar moves by Newcastle, Tottenham, Bournemouth and Norwich to take advantage of the scheme, under which employers can claim for 80 percent of furloughed employees' wages.

But former Reds players Jamie Carragher and Stan Collymore strongly criticised the move by the European champions, who in February announced pre-tax profits of £42 million (\$51 million) for 2018/19. Collymore was even more forthright, tweeting: "I don't know of any Liverpool fan of any standing that won't be anything other than disgusted at the club for furloughing staff."

Another former Anfield star, Germany's Dietmar Hamann tweeted: "Astounded by the news that @LFC takes advantage of the furlough scheme to claim 80% of non-playing staff wages back off the government."

