

**Head of Iran's Health Ministry Public Relations Office Said Yesterday That 24,236 People out of a Total of 60,500 Infected by Coronavirus Have Survived While 3,739 Have Unfortunately Succumbed to Death**

# IRAN NEWS

**A Senior Russian Diplomat Said in a Message on Monday That the International Atomic Energy Agency Is Monitoring Iranian Activities and That Iran Exercises Satisfactory Cooperation With the IAEA**

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## Iranians Need No U.S. Assistance

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Iranian people do not need any assistance from the U.S. amid the outbreak of the coronavirus, but expect Washington to stop obstructing the flow of humanitarian aid from international organizations, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Seyed Abbas Mousavi said the U.S. government is not expected to help the Iranian people in the battle with the coronavirus, but it must stop blocking the flow of aid from other countries and international institutions and allow financial transactions for the fight against COVID-19 to be conducted easily.

"We call on all independent and civilized countries in the world to ignore these illegal, cruel and baseless (US) sanctions and defy them, so that we could overcome this problem (coronavirus pandemic) through cooperation," he added.

On the U.S. president's comments that he is waiting by the phone for Iran to call and ask for the removal of the sanctions, Mousavi said the American officials have always been in a state of confusion over various issues.

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## HRW Blasts U.S. Refusal To Lift Iran Sanctions Amid Coronavirus

LONDON (Dispatches) - Human Rights Watch (HRW) has strongly criticized the United States for its refusal to lift sanctions on Iran amid the new coronavirus outbreak.

The report was published by the New York-based organization on Monday asserted that international law obliges any country imposing sanctions on another to "consider the impact on the human rights of the affected population, especially regarding their access to goods essential to life, including medicines and food."

The broad bans "are negatively affecting the Iranian government's ability to adequately respond to the mounting health consequences of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic," said the HRW.

Washington "should take immediate action to ease US sanctions and expand licensing of sanctions-exempt items to ensure Iran's access to essential humanitarian resources during the pandemic," the group added.

The virus can lead to a potentially fatal respiratory disease, called Covid-19. HRW cited figures released by Iran's Health Ministry on March 19 that showed almost 50 people contracted the virus every hour and one person died of it every 10 minutes in Iran.

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## Eurochambers Fully Supporting Humanitarian Aids to Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President of the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Eurochambres) says the association fully supports past and current EU efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Iran and will continue to do so.

In a letter to President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam Hossein Shafei, Christoph Leilt reaffirmed the necessity of pursuing a global action towards the crisis resulted by the new coronavirus outbreak in the world saying "In my eyes, this global pandemic calls for global coordinated actions and solidarity".

"Providing humanitarian assistance to Iran, especially in the current crisis, has never been questioned at the EU level," Eurochambres president said in his letter.

"I'm fully aware of the particularly grave health situation in Iran resulting from the pandemic, and I will of course share your request regarding access to medical equipment and supplies with the European Chamber network," Leilt said.

Christoph Leilt's letter came in response to a letter authored by Gholam Hossein Shafei on March 17, 2020 which called on European national and local chambers of commerce to ask their governments to defy Washington's anti-Iran sanctions amid the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

In his letter, Shafei denounced the U.S. sanctions against Iran as a flagrant violation of the most fundamental humanitarian principles saying that the sanctions have seriously hindered efforts in Iran for procuring medicine and medical equipment required for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

He called on those chambers of commerce which take their social responsibilities seriously to put pressure on their governments in accordance with their social mission to improve the situation for the Iranian people by mitigating the impact of unlawful U.S. sanctions, especially those related to the importation of medicine and medical equipment.

"I have the strong impression that humanitarian issues are of great importance to you," Shafei wrote in his letter to Leilt. "However, this positive impression is accompanied by an expectation that you ensure the supply of medicine and medical equipment and devices to Iran through negotiating with European Chambers of Commerce and informing them of the situation."

In response, Leilt further assured Shafei that the European Chamber network would do its best to continue to support efforts to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Iran and around the world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The association is one of the largest business representative organizations in Brussels, representing over 20 million companies through 45 members and a European network of 1,700 regional and local Chambers.

In another letter to Paul Polman, chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), president of the ICCIMA asked for arrangements through international business community and members of the organization to contribute to Iran's efforts to contain the pandemic.

The ICC later issued a call for G20 leaders to agree on coordinated steps to "ensure access to essential medical supplies, scale public health financing to tackle COVID-19 and restore confidence and stability in the global economy".

## Rockets Hit Near Foreign Oil Firms in Basra

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Several rockets have landed near offices of foreign and Iraqi oil companies in the southern city of Basra, the military says, amid warnings of false-flag U.S. operation aimed at creating further unrest in the country.

Police said three Katyusha rockets, launched at around 3 a.m. local time on Monday, hit the Burjesia district which houses foreign oil workers and offices of both foreign and Iraqi oil companies, west of Basra.

No damage or casualties have been reported in the district which has been largely empty in recent weeks due to the evacuation of almost all foreign personnel over the coronavirus pandemic.

According to two officials with state-run Basra Oil Co. (BOC) which oversees oil operation in the south production and export operations had not been affected by the attack.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

Police sources said they found a rocket launcher and some unused rockets in a close farmland area.

In recent months, the high-security Green Zone in the capital, Baghdad, has been repeatedly targeted by Katyusha rockets. Iraq's anti-terror resistance groups reiterate their readiness to counter any possible attack by U.S. occupation forces, saying that they are also on high alert for any false-flag U.S. operation aimed at creating further unrest in the Arab country.

The U.S. military has used such attacks as a pretext to pressure the Iraqi government to disband the country's popular anti-terror groups, which are now integrated into Iraq's regular armed forces, and staged airstrikes on their positions along with Israel. The latest developments come after reports that the Pentagon has ordered military commanders to plan for an escalation of American combat in Iraq.

## Iran to Have Blocked Funds Released

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian government says it will soon have parts of funds blocked abroad because of the US sanctions released and return to the country for the fight against the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Government Spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Monday that the government would soon announce some good news about unblocking the highly-needed funds.

"There has been some positive progress in unblocking our moneys," said Rabiei, adding, "There would be some good news in this regard which will be publicized after the finalization (of unblocking)."

The announcement comes more than a week after the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said that Iran was making progress in securing new sources of funds for the national fight against the new coronavirus.

Hemmati said that coordinated efforts by the CBI and the Iranian Foreign Ministry for unblocking the funds abroad as well as for persuading the International Monetary fund (IMF) to accept Iran's request for an emergency loan had come into fruition.

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## U.S. Weaponizing COVID-19 Against Iran And Venezuela

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - In the piece published by the New York Daily News, American film director Oliver Stone denounces the US government for refusing to remove murderous sanctions on Iran and Venezuela in the context of a global health crisis.

"It is accurate to say that the U.S. is weaponizing the virus against these countries," Stone said.

The award-winning filmmaker warned, 'plagues expose the foundations of injustice' in our societies," film director Oliver Stone wrote in an op-ed Saturday exposing the United States government "profound lack of human decency" amid the new coronavirus pandemic.

In the piece published by the New York Daily News, Stone denounces the U.S. government for refusing to remove murderous sanctions on Iran and Venezuela in the context of a global health crisis.

He urged for a "serious moral self-reflection," and warned that countless lives were at risk unless there is an "immediate change in course."

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## Pakistani Speaker Calls for Lifting of Anti-Iran Sanctions

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly Asad Qaiser on Monday called for removal of U.S. sanctions on Iran.

In a letter to his Iranian counterpart Ali Larijani, Qaiser prayed for the good health and long life of his Iranian counterpart. "On behalf of the National Assembly of Pakistan and my own behalf, I am writing to convey our joint prayers and best wishes for your good health," he said.

He said: As I seek Almighty Allah's blessings for the continued progress and prosperity of entire Muslim Ummah, I also seek His bounties for Your Excellency's personal health and long life.

Asad Qaiser noted the ongoing issue of Coronavirus poses a threat to the well-being of the entire humanity, which is all the more reason the world should come together to combat the pandemic disease for safety of our people.

"It is with this wish that Prime Minister Imran Khan is calling for lifting of sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said.

"I assure you my nation's complete support in this difficult situation and pray that the brave people of Islamic Republic of Iran will soon overcome this problem," said Qaiser.

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# New Head of Iran's Red Crescent Society Appointed

TEHRAN (MNA) – President Hassan Rouhani has appointed Karim Hemmati as the new head of the country's Red Crescent Society (IRCS).

In a decree on Monday, Rouhani assigned Hemmati to the post of the head of the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran given his educational degrees, expertise, and executive experiences.

Hemmati was appointed as the caretaker of the IRCS, after the former head of the organization, Ali-Asghar Peyvandi, resigned from his position late 2019.

## Knowledge-Based Companies Making Iran Self-Sufficient

**TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says the country is attaining self-sufficiency in the production of a broad range of commodities thanks to the good investment in the development of knowledge-based companies.**

In comments on the sidelines of a Sunday visit to an exhibition of high-tech products for the fight against the novel coronavirus, President Rouhani said his administration has been making efforts to strengthen and promote the knowledge-based companies over the past couple of years.

The plans to strengthen the infrastructures of domestic knowledge-based companies have boosted businesses, promoted technologies and elevated the country's position in scientific rankings, the president added.

He also noted that development of the knowledge-based companies has made Iran self-sufficient in the production of many goods which were being imported in the past.



The domestic production of commodities by the knowledge-based businesses has reduced the expenditure on imports and has created a large market for the Iranian products, he added.

The president also said investment in strengthening the infrastructures in the health system has now helped the country at the time of crisis, noting that advanced medical equipment are currently at the disposal of the medical society for the battle with COVID-19.

## \$500m Allocated to Compensate For Losses of Transport Companies

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Minister of Roads and Civil Development says the government has allocated about \$500 million to compensate for the losses the transportation companies that suffered damages from the Coronavirus outbreak.

Mohammad Eslami said on Sunday that the companies usually recompense their annual expenses during the Nowruz because these holidays provide financial resources to companies so that they could fully cover their annual expenses.

However, this year, the number of Nowruz trips decreased dramatically due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In the rail sector, we saw a 94% decrease in travel, and in the aviation sector, we saw a 70% decrease. At the same time, various jobs were identified by the government, and it was announced that unnecessary jobs be closed until the end of the crisis, reiterated Eslami.

"We hope that the money of travellers whose trips have been cancelled will be returned to them soon and in the coming days," added Eslami in a radio program interview.

Referring to the President's order to assess the condition of passenger terminals and airports, the roads minister said screening is carried out at the entrances and exits of passenger and cargo terminals.

The Minister of Roads and Urban Development emphasized the screening was implemented from the very first days of the outbreak of the Corona disease in passenger terminals, freight terminals, airports and other subdivisions of the ministry.

Currently, disinfection of equipment, control and screening of passengers and crew are among the most important tasks performed properly, he underlined.

## Gov't Urged to Provide More Support to Families With No Income

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN – The government should implement necessary measures to support individuals to earn a living during the coronavirus spread, said a member of national security commission of Iran's parliament Alaeddin Boroujerdi.

"While some families are currently struggling, the government can order to have their bank loan payments delayed or provide discounts," Boroujerdi said.

"People depend on the government and it can provide special discounts for example - provision of natural gas for three months," said the MP.

"In situation when incomes have dropped to zero, the government can reduce costs to a minimum," he added.

"The issue should be reviewed by the National Headquarters to Fight Coronavirus, since the following establishment has authority that is on the same level with the National Security Council to make decisions," he said.

"The government should consider the coronavirus situation in other countries in the world serious, otherwise the duration of this disease in our country would last longer. The statistics show the number of infections in recent days has grown," he added.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11. Some sources claim the coronavirus outbreak started as early as November 2019.

## Iran to Assist Nationals Quarantined in Kuwait

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Embassy in Kuwait says the Islamic Republic is pursuing the health conditions of the Iranian nationals quarantined in Kuwait due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In a statement released on Sunday, the embassy reacted to a video circulating in the social media over the poor health condition of Iranians quarantined in Kuwait, noting that it will make every effort to move them to more suitable places soon.

It added that after receiving the information that the residing complex of the Iranians was also inhabited by some non-Iranian nationals who had tested positive for coronavirus, all the Iranian residents were also tested for the coronavirus.

Quoting the Kuwaiti Health Ministry, the statement said 38 patients tested positive with the virus and are currently receiving treatment, while 540 others were moved out of the complex and forced to spend 14 days in quarantine.

The embassy stressed its stance on the necessity of providing those in quarantine with necessary hygienic materials as well as food, saying it has proposed the dispatch of the embassy's representative to the premises of the quarantine to check the conditions.

Reportedly, it has been agreed to move the quarantined people including Iranians and non-Iranians to more suitable places.

## Official Urges Probe into U.S.' Role in Creation of COVID-19



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Head of Iran's Civil Defense Organization called for the formation of a fact-finding committee to look into the possible role of the U.S. government in the creation of coronavirus.

Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said the U.S. government has the world's "biggest biological army" and may have been behind the creation of the novel coronavirus.

The United States claims to be the world leader, but it has formulated a biological cooperation plan and has established 25 laboratories with biosafety level (BSL) 3 and 4 in various parts of the world, he added.

The American biological laboratories are not subject to any international monitoring and do not report to any organization either, Jalali noted, saying the US has already resorted to biological agents in the past, as in the Vietnam War.

"In fact, the U.S. has been always accused of having a role, either intentionally or accidentally, in the biological events, like the (outbreak of) Ebola, and the US is believed to have taken a deliberate measure (in creating coronavirus) with the highest probability," the Iranian official noted.

The general said the Civil Defense Organization of Iran has set up taskforces to study the various aspects of outbreak of coronavirus inside and outside the country and consider different speculations.

He also called for a series of global measures to look into the COVID-19 pandemic, stressing, "First of all, a fact-finding committee must be formed by the countries that are independent of the influence exerted by the other states, such as the US, in order to study the aspects of the subject."

The laboratories belonging to the parties that are accused of wrongdoing must be visited and reports should be received from the labs about their activities, Jalali added.

Moreover, a protocol and an international monitoring committee must be established to control the activities of the 25 American laboratories with biosafety level 3 and 4 across the world, he underlined. The Iranian general further called for the formation of a global campaign to push for the closure of the research biological laboratories in various countries that are exempted from international monitoring.

General Jalali then highlighted Iran's measures to contain and control the spread of coronavirus epidemic, saying the local factories have fulfilled the need for masks, gloves and disinfectants with the help of military industries.

"I believe that if the current trend continues, we will be able to play a role in the export of medical items in the near future," he noted. He finally noted that despite the weak points, the Islamic Republic has decent and acceptable conditions amid the outbreak of coronavirus in comparison with the countries that claim to be advanced and developed states.

## FM Hails China as Forefront of Fighting Coronavirus

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson has lauded China's role in the international struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic and its efforts assisting other countries counter the outbreak.

"The government and people of China lead the way in suppressing coronavirus & generously aiding countries across the world," Seyed Abbas Mousavi said in tweet on Saturday.

"The Chinese bravery, dedication & professionalism in COVID-19 containment deserve acknowledgment," he said, adding that Iran has "always been thankful to China in these trying times".

As of Saturday, confirmed cases of COVID-19 have topped 1.2 million cases across the world.

China, where the outbreak began last year, however, reported only 30 new infections on Saturday as infections surged in the United States and Europe.

Taking a break from what is appears to be the peak of the outbreak, China has sought to assist countries grappling with the pandemic by providing medical aid and supplies.

China acted extremely quickly and very proactively and with transparency and saved millions of people dying from the coronavirus outbreak, says Dennis Etler.

Iran, which sent several aid shipments to China during the height of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, was sent its ninth aid shipment from China on Sunday.

On Sunday and in controversial remarks, Iran's health ministry spokesman had criticized China for its inaccurate reports regarding the coronavirus, saying the initial reports made other countries underestimate the severity of the disease.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said statistics presented by China were a "bitter joke" because many across the world thought the disease caused by COVID-19 was similar to influenza and had a low fatality rate.

"The outbreak did not turn into an epidemic in Japan. We use the word 'epidemic' when one percent of the population contracts a disease. Likewise, we cannot say we are facing an epidemic in all parts of Iran. In some parts of the country (Iran) there are individual cases of infection. In most parts of the country the number of infections is surging, and some cities we are at the 'epidemic' stage. Even there is no epidemic in South Korea," the spokesman noted.

## Iran Producing Favipiravir for First Time to Treat Coronavirus

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has produced favipiravir for the first time as it continues its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, says the head of Iran's Masih Daneshvari Hospital, which is one of the leading medical centers treating patients with the new coronavirus infection in the Iranian capital.

Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, who is also a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, made the remarks in a meeting with the medical staff of the hospital on Sunday.

"Fortunately, favipiravir was produced for the first time at Shahid Beheshti Medical University's School of Pharmacy and has been made available to Masih Daneshvari Hospital ... to be used for treatment of coronavirus patients," Velayati said.

He added that treatment of coronavirus patients at the hospital was cost-free and all services were provided gratis.

The new development came after reports indicating that Iranian pharmaceutical companies and leading infectious disease experts have joined hands to produce an anti-malaria drug, recommended by the World Health Organization, to treat COVID-19 patients at a time when US sanctions hinder the country's access to drugs and medical equipment.

Iran is one of the first countries to use an anti-malaria drug to treat coronavirus patients.

They say they will continue to produce the medicine as long as the country needs it. The efforts are particularly crucial as Iran is under one of the toughest sanction regimes ever imposed on a country.

## Iran Makes Breakthrough by Synchronization of Iranian, Iraqi Power Grids

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Monday that Iran made breakthrough by synchronization of Iranian and Iraq power grids thanks to expertise and advanced technology.

Speaking through video conference in the meeting of the Council of Deputy Ministers and Managing Directors of Iran's Ministry of Energy, he said that synchronizing of the two countries national grids, reducing losses in Iraq's national grid, maintaining and repairing the Iraqi network's equipment and training the Iraqi staff were among the measures which were decided to be implemented during a specific time frame.

As of November 2019, the two countries' power grids are operating in coordination with each other.

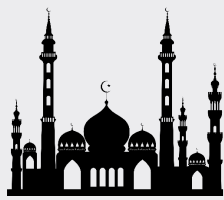
Back in October, Deputy Head of Iran Electricity Industry Syndicate said that power grids of Iran and Iraq were going to be interconnected by the end of 2019.

Payam Baqeri said that according to a contract, Iranian energy ministry has planned to reduce losses of electricity in Iraqi national grid to 30 percent from over 50 percent by the end of the year 2020.

Iraq is a strategic market for all Iranian industries including the energy sector and according to agreements reached between the two countries energy ministries, the two sides will carry out joint projects in the electricity sector over three years in three stages in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

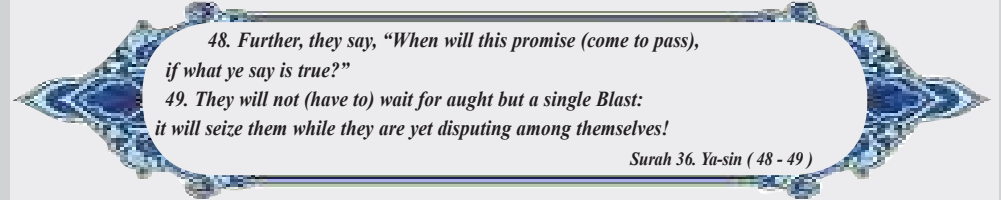






## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:49
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:13
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:41



# IME Pursues Alluring Int'l Traders

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Legal Advisor to the Head of Iran Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) says due to some measures adopted by the Iran Mercantile Exchange in the international realm through signing agreements and defining joint projects with other countries' mercantile exchanges, soon foreign dealers will be present on the IME to boost its international role in the national economy.**

Speaking to ILNA, Mr. Bahador Bijani detailed the role of the IME in national economy, saying that IME since its first day has played fundamental role in national economy as the country has witnessed major essential developments in terms of real price discovery of goods and transparency of trade.

He added that by a glance at the total number of trade done in the capital market, one can see that IME has had the major share of the total trade. He further stated that this issue indicates the upward growth of the IME and attaching importance to its role by officials and activists in industries and market.

Bijani also pointed to the role of IME in developing infrastructures and production in steel and petrochemicals industries as well as eliminating middlemen from the market, adding that the real pricing of products in steel and petrochemicals industries has had direct role in development of these industries and transfer of profit for production.

He further said IME has witnessed great developments through the years and it seems that regarding to the existing capacities, the country would witness the rise in the role of IME in national economy.



He went on to say that IME has boosted its international activities along with its domestic activities.

Bijani noted that some noticeable products are presented on IME that foreign consumers are the major customers of those goods and sometimes these foreign purchasers provide their necessary goods by deal with their Iranian counterparts.

He reiterated that in case the ground is prepared for interaction and cooperation between IME and mercantile exchanges in other countries, several Iranian products can be presented to other countries directly and with transparent price and then IME's role can be international.

Bijani further said that in the international field, IME has started several negotiations with its target markets and has signed some agreements with some of them and it has defined project for cooperation with other countries and the talks are still underway in order that IME's role could turn international.

He reiterated that in all layers of managements in the country there is a strong belief on proper price discovery, transparency in trade and elimination of misuses, adding that this belief has boosted the value of IME in the national economy and day in day, significance of its role in the market for boom in production and economic stability is on the rise.

## Switzerland Not to Join INSTEX



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN -** Chairman of Iran-Switzerland Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Sharif Nezam Mafi says Swiss companies have no exports to Iran except medicines and cereals and the trade between both countries is very insignificant

Speaking to ILNA and on the operation of Iran-Switzerland financial mechanism in the current condition for providing food and medicines, he said in fact Iran-Switzerland financial mechanism has been launched but it needs capital in order that companies can have access to it for buying necessary stuff and it now depends on the Central Bank how much it injects cash into the channel for companies to trade.

He noted that Swiss government issues export insurance for those Swiss companies which are active in this mechanism and it can reduce risk for them for exports but all depends on the existing money in the mechanism.

Nezam Mafi went on to say that for now, there is full readiness in the mechanism and now all depends on the capital in it which should be injected by the Central Bank. On the impacts of sanctions on trade between Iran and Switzerland, he said Iran's exports to Switzerland have extremely dropped and Swiss companies have no exports to Iran except those which are active in pharmaceutical and food sectors.

On Switzerland's joining to European Union's financial mechanism, INSTEX, he said it is impossible that Switzerland joins the INSTEX as the country has its own mechanism and it has nothing to do with the INSTEX and INSTEX has different story that EU pursues it.

## South Pars Gas Extraction Capacity Surpasses 700m cm



**IRAN NWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN -** The managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company with installation of the jacket of Phase 11 the natural gas production of the gas field surpassed 700 million cubic meters.

Mohammad Meshkinfam said the offshore part of Phase 11, and six platforms of phases 13, 14, 22, 23, and 24 were installed in the last Iranian year (starting on March 20, 2019), four of which have been operationalized.

Meshkinfam said that the other two platforms will be operationalized in two weeks, adding that commissioning the platforms 13 A and C were postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Because a lot of people gathered together heightens the risk of coronavirus infection, we are trying to do the job with the minimum staff members needed, he said.

Meshkinfam said that the offshore part of the Phase 14 refinery was completed by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20) and all the efforts are focused to finish the sweetening part of the refinery by the end of the current year (20, March 2021).

He added after the jacket of Phase 11 is installed in the Persian Gulf in a few months, the drilling operation will kick off. The installation of the jacket was delayed due to the epidemic outbreak.

Regarding Farzad Gas Field, he said that Petropars is supposed to put forth its programs for expansion of the field. Pars Oil and Gas Company has currently 17 project in progress and 22 more will be added this year, he said.

## Kuwait to Resume Imports of Foodstuff From Iran

**TEHRAN (IRNA) -** Kuwait Commerce and Industry Ministry announced on Sunday that the country will resume imports of foodstuff from Iran which have been stopped due to spread of coronavirus.

Deputy Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Afasi said the country's decision to reimport food from Iran to Kuwait is part of the efforts to provide goods and food needed by people in Kuwait's central markets.

Over the past days, Kuwait's markets seem a shortage of some goods and foodstuff as well as surge in prices. Earlier and after spread of the novel coronavirus, Kuwait had banned import of any agricultural products from Iran. During the emergency meeting of trade and industry ministers of Persian Gulf Cooperation member states held through a video conference last Thursday, Kuwait proposed establishment of foodstuff security network to ensure food security of the Persian Gulf states.

## INSTEX Has No Regular Rhythm

**TEHRAN (ILNA) -** A member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, Ali Shariati told ILNA on Sunday that if INSTEX doesn't operational now, it will not come up with more economic benefits.

The Iranian official told that Iran is facing a major challenge controlling the coronavirus outbreak and, on the other hand, is suffering from U.S. sanctions which hinder its access to drugs and medical equipment, so INSTEX mechanism must be operational today.

"INSTEX has been created to provide food and medicine, but it has not yet been operationalized, although there are some new signs but it is not enough," he confirmed.

He added that there are no full-fledged transactions yet in the framework of INSTEX and there is no regular rhythm.

France, Germany and the UK confirmed on Tuesday (31 March) that INSTEX has successfully concluded its first transaction to facilitate the export of medical goods from Europe to the pandemic-hit country.

The EU-Iran Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) was born as the brainchild of France, Germany and the UK in January 2019 as a special purpose vehicle to help EU companies do business with Iran and facilitate non-USD transactions to avoid breaking US sanctions against the country.

## First India-Iran-Afghanistan Intermodal Transport Operational

**TEHRAN (MNA) –** Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) announced on Sunday that the first India-Iran-Afghanistan intermodal transport, using Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) has been completed.

Secretary General Umberto de Pretto International Road Transport Union (IRU) congratulated the event saying that "Iran's Chabahar port can be a gateway for Indian goods to Afghanistan and central Asia."

"The Iranian gateway can accelerate the transporting procedures up to 20 percent with lower prices," he added. "This first intermodal TIR transport from India along the Chabahar corridor is an exciting development in the region and goes to demonstrate the wider potential of intermodal TIR for shippers and transport operators around the world," said IRU Secretary General.

This first TIR transport operation is based on the Chabahar transit agreement signed between India and

Iran, and represents the initial step towards the full activation of the India-Iran-Afghanistan route.

In addition to linking Iran to Afghanistan, Central Asia, Russia and eventually Europe, Chabahar also is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean.

## Gov't to Increase Pension Wages for Certain Layers of Retired Citizens

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN -** Iran will increase pension wages by some 15 percent, said the Head of Plan and Budget Organization of Iran Mohammad Bagher Nobakht.

"The pension and benefits committee is expected to increase wages of retired employees by 15 percent, while the retired employees with 30-year work experience should have their pensions reach 30,8 million rials (about \$904)," said Nobakht.

"While the salary of retired public and military employees would increase by 8 million rials (about \$190), the healthcare benefits for this group would also increase from 600,000 rials (about \$14) to 1.4 million rials (about \$33)," he added. "A total of 100,000 billion rials will be distributed as pension wages for different groups of retired workers," he said.

## Knowledge-Based Firms Producing Standard Disinfectants

**TEHRAN (MNA) –** The Head of the Coronavirus Control Operations HQ in Tehran said that knowledge-based firms are producing disinfectants and hand sanitizers according to the highest standards.

Alireza Zali made the remarks on Sunday, saying that five knowledge-based companies under the HNT Holding are directly working on products related to fighting COVID-19 outbreak, praising the complex for inaugurating production lines in the shortest time possible. Zali went on to say that another section of this holding will have a key role in producing N95 and N99 face masks which enjoy the highest quality regarding protection against the virus.

## Iran, UAE Trade Underway by Observing Health Protocols

**TEHRAN (MNA) –** Chairman of Iran-UAE Joint Chamber of Commerce Farshid Farzanegan said that trade between Islamic Republic of Iran and United Arab Emirates (UAE) is underway through observing health protocols to contain the coronavirus

Given the outbreak of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, throughout the world and the significance of ensuring the health and wellbeing of people, health protocols and sanitary regulations are executed in all countries while admitting and transporting exported cargos, he added.

Accordingly, health protocols are strictly observed with regards to admitting export cargoes of Iranian products to the United Arab Emirates and all Iran's export goods are transported to the United Arab Emirates via refrigerated containers, Farzanegan noted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the transport of products via air and added, "some airlines transport basic commodities from the United Arab Emirates towards Iran and effective steps have been taken in this regard."

Iran's export of fresh fruit to UAE is of paramount importance, he said, adding, "presently, Iran's export of fruit to the Arab country is underway without any obstacle."

## Iraqi PM-Designate Invites Iran to Invest

**BAGHDAD (IRNA) -** Iraqi Prime Minister-designate Adnan Al-Zurfi has invited the Islamic Republic of Iran to make investments in the country.

In an interview with an Iraqi media on Monday, he thanked Iran over its assistance to Iraq in the battle against the terrorist group of Daesh (ISIS).

"I will concentrate on the economy and invite the United States and Iran to invest in Iraq," he said adding, "I can make economic changes and keep Iraq out of the conflict."

The country needs foreign technology companies for making progress, and a new reality in Iraq will start with the economy, he further noted.



## Magnitude 6.1 Quake Jolts Eastern Indonesia

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - A magnitude 6.1 earthquake rattled Indonesia's Maluku province early Monday, according to the country's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency.

The epicenter was located 122 kilometers (76 miles) northwest of Jailolo at a depth of 10 kilometers (6.2 miles).

The agency did not issue a tsunami alert and there were no immediate reports of damage.

Thirty-six people were killed in magnitude 6.8 quake in Ambon, the capital city of Maluku, in September.



## Germany to Buy Unbelievable Amount of Facemasks

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - Germany is ramping up efforts to purchase facemasks in an effort to contain the coronavirus, the country's vice chancellor, Olaf Scholz, told the Anne Will television show on Sunday.

"We need unbelievable amounts of masks. Our entire effort is to procure them. That is where we stand today," he told the programme which was broadcast on ZDF.

Germany's efforts to buy masks comes at a time when the United States has stepped up efforts to do the same, prompting complaints about the superpower's "Wild West" tactics in outbidding buyers who have already signed deals.



## Virus Tide Turns in Europe as U.S. Girds for 'Pearl Harbor' Moment



PARIS (AFP) - Europe's hardest-hit nations saw some tentative signs of hope in the fight against the coronavirus Monday but the United States braced for its "Pearl Harbor moment" as the country's death toll raced towards 10,000.

The virus has infected virtually every corner of the planet, confining nearly half of humanity to their homes and turning life upside down for billions on a deadly march that has claimed nearly 70,000 victims.

Queen Elizabeth II delivered only her fourth emergency address in a 68-year reign to urge Britain and Commonwealth nations to "remain united and resolute" as Prime Minister Boris Johnson was hospitalised with the disease.

But there was cause for cheer in some European hotspots, with Italy reporting its lowest death toll in two weeks, Spanish fatalities dropping for the third straight day and France seeing its fewest dead in a week.

"The curve has started its descent and the number of deaths has started to drop," said top Italian health official Silvio Brusaferro, adding the next phase could be a gradual easing of a strict month-long lockdown.

In Spain, nurse Empar Loren said: "The situation is more stable. The number of patients in intensive care is not growing much anymore, and we are starting to discharge quite a few."

At a field hospital set up at a Madrid conference centre, staff applauded whenever a patient was healthy enough to be sent home.

Builder Eduardo Lopez, 59, gave a "10/10" rating to the staff who cared for him "with tenderness and a great dose of humanity".

But while the curve was bending in Europe, there was little sign of let-up in the United States, where the death toll approached 10,000 and authorities warned worse was around the corner.

"This is going to be the hardest and the saddest week of most Americans' lives, quite frankly," US Surgeon General Jerome Adams told Fox News.

"This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment, only it's not going to be localised." The death toll in hardest-hit New York state rose to 4,159, Governor Andrew Cuomo said, up from 3,565 a day prior.

It was the first time the daily toll had dropped but Cuomo said it was too early to tell whether that was a "blip."

Images from New York showed medics in protective gear wheeling bodies on stretchers to refrigerated trailers repurposed as makeshift morgues. The city that never sleeps was quiet, the streets around Time Square deserted as neon lights continued to flicker, one reading: "2020. To those fighting for our lives. Thank you."

President Donald Trump has warned of "horrific" death toll numbers and John Hopkins University said more than 1,200 people had died of coronavirus complications over the past day.

In an empty Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis, head of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, appealed for people to show courage in the face of the pandemic. The elderly pontiff, who himself has been tested twice for the virus, celebrated his Palm Sunday mass by livestream.

Other religious leaders went to more extraordinary lengths to deliver the traditional Palm Sunday blessing, with Archbishop Jose Domingo Ulloa of Panama celebrating from a helicopter. The effective mothballing of the global economy is beginning to hit hard with analysts warning poverty levels will spike with millions of jobs lost despite unprecedented stimulus programmes.

But some in poorer countries are already chafing against curfews destroying their livelihoods.

"How can anyone stay home without anything to eat?" asked Garcia Landu, a motorcycle taxi driver in Angola's bustling capital Luanda.

"Better to die of this disease or gunshot than to starve to death," he said.

## Taliban Threaten More Attacks If Peace Deal Not Honored

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The Afghan Taliban warned Sunday that it will resume full-scale attacks if a peace agreement signed with the U.S. in February is not followed in letter and spirit.

In a statement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid accused the Afghan government of delaying the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners which was promised under the agreement.

"The Islamic Emirate has so far remained committed to the agreement and its contents. U.S. officials have also acknowledged that the Islamic Emirate's mujahideen have acted on compromises," Mujahid said in a statement, referring to the Taliban's shadow government.

Until intra-Afghan talks lead to a separate agreement with Afghan leaders, the Taliban can attack the Kabul administration's military centers but has refrained from doing so, he added.

"The American side and their internal and external military supporters have committed several violations, including not releasing the 5,000 prisoners, carrying out attacks on Taliban centers and raids and bombing of civilian settlements," Mujahid said.



## UN Chief Urges Gov'ts to Protect Women During Virus Lockdown

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is urging governments around the world to include the protection of women in their response to the deadly novel coronavirus pandemic.

"Violence is not confined to the battlefield," said Guterres in a statement and a video released in multiple languages, reminiscent of his call for a ceasefire in conflicts worldwide to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest. In their own homes," Guterres said.

"Over the past weeks as economic and social pressures and fear have grown, we have seen a horrifying global surge in domestic violence."

"I urge all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19," he said.

Guterres called for setting up emergency warning systems in pharmacies and groceries, and for safe ways "for women to seek support, without alerting their abusers."

"Together, we can and must prevent violence everywhere, from war zones to people's homes, as we work to beat COVID-19," he said, as he called "for peace at home — and in homes — around the world."



The agreement has been violated in the Afghan provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Farah, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Paktia, Badakhshan, Balkh and other parts of the country, the details of which have been communicated to the American side from time to time, he added.

Mujahid urged the U.S. to respect the content of the agreement and asked its allies in Afghanistan to follow the agreement in its full spirit.

"If such breaches continue, it would create an atmosphere of mistrust that will not only damage the agreement but also force the mujahideen to respond similarly and will increase the level of fighting," he warned.

The Taliban have demanded the release of 5,000 of their militants in return for the release of 1,000 captives, including Afghan government officials and security personnel.

The Afghan government, however, insists on releasing them in phases along with intra-Afghan talks and a ceasefire in place.

## China Sees Rises in New Coronavirus Cases

BEIJING (Reuters) - Mainland China reported 39 new coronavirus cases as of Sunday, up from 30 a day earlier, and the number of asymptomatic cases also surged, as Beijing continued to struggle to extinguish the outbreak despite drastic containment efforts.

The National Health Commission said in a statement on Monday that 78 new asymptomatic cases had been identified as of the end of the day on Sunday, compared with 47 the day before.

Imported cases and asymptomatic patients, who have the virus and can give it to others but show no symptoms, have become China's chief concern in recent weeks after draconian containment measures succeeded in slashing the infection rate.

Of the new cases showing symptoms, 38 were people who had entered China from abroad, compared with 25 a day earlier. One new locally transmitted infection was reported, in the southern province of Guangdong, down from five a day earlier in the same province.

The new locally transmitted case, in the city of

Shenzhen, was a person who had travelled from Hubei province, the original epicentre of the outbreak, Guangdong provincial authorities said.

The Guangdong health commission raised the risk level for a total of four districts in the cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Jieyang from low to medium late on Sunday.

Mainland China has now reported a total of 81,708 cases, with 3,331 deaths.

Daily infections have fallen dramatically from the peak of the epidemic in February, when hundreds were reported daily, but new infections continue to appear daily.

The country has closed off its borders to foreigners as the virus spreads globally, though most imported cases involve Chinese nationals returning from overseas.

The central government also has pushed local authorities to identify and isolate the asymptomatic patients.

Interactive graphic tracking global spread of coronavirus: [open tmsnrts/3aIRuz7](https://open.tmsnrts/3aIRuz7) in an external browser.



## Most Brazilians Do Not Want Bolsonaro to Resign

SAO PAULO (Reuters) - Most Brazilians do not favor President Jair Bolsonaro resigning despite mounting criticism of his handling of the coronavirus outbreak, according to a poll published by newspaper Folha de S.Paulo on Sunday.

The survey conducted by Datafolha pollster from Wednesday to Friday showed that 59% of the 1,511 respondents would oppose Bolsonaro's resignation, while 37% would approve and 4% could not give an opinion. The margin of error was 3 percentage points, the newspaper said.

Bolsonaro has never suggested he is considering resigning.

On Friday, the same pollster said Bolsonaro's coronavirus performance was rated "bad" or "awful" by 39% of respondents surveyed, up from 33% last month. Those who consider his response to the health crisis "good" or "great" slipped to 33% from 35%.

Brazil's death toll rose to 486 from 431, while the number of confirmed cases jumped to 11,130 from 10,278, according to Health Ministry figures released on Sunday afternoon.

Bolsonaro has downplayed the COVID-19 respiratory disease from the novel coronavirus as a "little flu," stirring up conflicts with governors and his own health minister who advocate social distancing measures that the president sees as economically disastrous.

His insistence in fighting unemployment during an unprecedented public health crisis has driven his approval rating to its lowest level since he took office last year in a conservative swing by Brazilian voters.

Bolsonaro called for a national day of fasting and prayer on Sunday to "free Brazil from this evil" epidemic. Evangelical supporters played a key role in his election.

Even with lockdown measures paralyzing most of Latin America's largest economy, Brazilian agribusiness is striving to avoid supply disruptions and emerge from the crisis even stronger.

"We must ensure our crop this year continues plentiful so we can supply our own country and jump at opportunities that may arise," Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina Dias told agribusiness representatives on Sunday.

She noted some countries in the Northern Hemisphere would have a shorter planting window this year because of the coronavirus. "I have the feeling that we can become a great food supplier to the rest of the world," Cristina said.







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## Turkey's Agri-Exports Rise in March

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey recorded a nearly 5% growth in agricultural exports in March due to the global increase in food demand. However, the country's overall exports suffered a more than 17% drop as the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic becomes increasingly clear.

According to figures released by the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM) on Saturday, Turkey's total exports declined 17.8% year-on-year to \$13.42 billion (TL 90.3 billion) in March. Compared to the widespread decline in exports across key sectors, agricultural exports performed well with 4.5% growth, reaching \$2.38 billion. Industrial exports, in the meantime, dropped by a whopping 20.5% to \$10.47 billion, the latest data showed.



## U.S. Small Businesses Seek \$5.4b in Virus Relief Loans

NEW YORK (AFP) - Small and medium-size U.S. businesses have applied for more than \$5.4 billion in government-backed loans as a key pillar of the country's coronavirus relief plan took effect, the Trump administration said.

Jovita Carranza, who heads the federal Small Business Administration, said late Friday on Twitter that 17,503 companies -- those with 500 or fewer employees -- had filed applications through local banks for loans totaling more than \$5.4 billion.

Friday was the first day the companies were able to apply for the money, intended in large part to help them pay employees' salaries.

The loans, which could eventually total \$350 billion, constitute a central part of the \$2.2 trillion coronavirus relief plan adopted by Congress and then signed into law by President Donald Trump on March 27.

"I will immediately ask Congress for more money to support small businesses... if the allocated money runs out," Trump tweeted Saturday.

But things were "so far, way ahead of schedule," he said, adding that Bank of America and community banks "are rocking!"

On Friday, most applications were submitted to local banks. Some of the biggest U.S. banks said they had encountered difficulties with administrative procedures, although Bank of America reported that it had processed tens of thousands of applications by the end of the day.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told the Fox Business Network that "our expectation is starting next week" all big banks would be ready.

Companies that receive the money and do not fire their workers -- or that otherwise re-hire those they have laid off -- will have their debt forgiven.

The funds are intended to help hundreds of thousands of restaurants, hair salons and other small- and medium-size businesses pay wages and rent for eight weeks, allowing them to keep staff on the payroll during virus-enforced closures.

"If we run out of money we're going to go back to Congress and get more money," Mnuchin said. "This is a great, great program with bipartisan support."

But Mnuchin said he was working with key bank executives to iron out any kinks and expected the largest banks to be taking part in the coming week.

Mnuchin also said money transfers to households would start within two weeks, down from the previously estimated three weeks.

### UAE Officially Asks to Postpone Expo 2020 Dubai

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The UAE has officially requested to postpone the start of the Expo 2020 Dubai until October next year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the body that oversees the world fair said.

Dubai had hoped to attract some 25 million visits to the multi-billion-dollar, six-month event, which was scheduled to launch October 20 this year. "The government of the United Arab Emirates has formally requested the postponement of World Expo 2020 Dubai," the Paris-based Bureau International des Expositions said in a statement. "Following consultations with the BIE, participating countries and key stakeholders, the UAE has proposed 1 October 2021 -- 31 March 2022 as the new opening dates of Expo 2020 Dubai."

The UAE government also requested approval to continue using Expo 2020 Dubai as the event's official name.

The BIE said it would hold a virtual meeting on April 21 to discuss "options for a change of dates."

"The request of the UAE government has been sent following in-depth discussions by the Expo 2020 Dubai steering committee with the organizer and the BIE on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic," said the statement.

"A final decision on a change of dates can only be made by a two-thirds majority vote of BIE member states." Dubai, known for hosting hundreds of conferences annually, has already scrapped a string of cultural and entertainment events in recent weeks over the spread of the deadly disease. Expo 2020 organizers said on Monday they had recommended a one-year postponement due to the pandemic.

### Malaysia's Potential Output Grows 4.5% Last Year

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's potential output grew moderately 4.5 per cent last year and is expected to turn negative this year, Bank Negara Malaysia said in its inaugural Economic and Monetary Review 2019.

Potential output is the highest non-inflationary level of output that can be produced in an economy.

Bank Negara said the moderate growth was due to the contraction in investment activity as a result of softer business sentiments and the continued rationalisation efforts by the government.

"This was partially offset by the marginal improvement in labour force growth in 2019 (2.1 per cent growth; 2018: 2.0 per cent)," it said.

Meanwhile, the central bank said the country's actual gross domestic product (GDP) expansion of 4.3 per cent last year was below potential output growth.

"This was due mainly to weaker external demand and supply disruptions in the commodities sectors that led to an underutilisation of resources.

"This led to the narrowing of the positive output gap to 0.4 per cent during the year (2018: 0.6 per cent).



"As such, price pressures were benign as the inflation rate remained stable at 0.7 per cent (Core inflation: 1.5 per cent) during the year," it said.

Bank Negara said the output gap was projected to turn negative in 2020.

While the potential output is expected to grow between 4.3 and 4.8 per cent this year, actual output will be significantly affected by the adverse impact from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Hence, actual output is projected to continue to grow at a slower pace relative to potential output in 2020," it added.

## Egypt Non-Oil Private Sector Contracts Faster as Virus Hits

CAIRO (Reuters) - Egypt's non-oil private sector activity contracted at a far faster rate in March than in February as the coronavirus-induced economic slowdown spread across the globe, a survey showed on Sunday.

IHS Markit's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for the non-oil private sector came in at 44.2 last month, down from 47.1 in February and far below the 50.0 threshold that separates growth from contraction.

It was the sharpest contraction since January 2017, shortly after Egypt put in place austerity measures as part of an IMF-backed economic reform programme signed in November 2016.

"The global economy is notably reeling from the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic ... the Egyptian non-oil private sector was no exception," said IHS Markit economist David Owen.

IHS Markit said the March survey registered the weakest level of optimism in the series' history, with confidence falling for a third month in a row, driven by concerns around the pandemic, especially its effect on the tourism industry.

The spread of the novel coronavirus has almost totally shut down Egyptian tourism, which accounts for an estimated 15% of gross domestic product. The last scheduled airline flights to Egypt ended on March 19.

Both output and new orders at Egyptian businesses fell, with output dropping to 40.6 in March from 46.2 in February and new orders to 40.2 from 46.2.

Businesses said they were also hurt by factory closures in China.

A contraction in non-oil sector employment extended for a fifth straight month in March, but at a slightly slower rate. The employment sub-index came in at 47.0 March compared with 46.8 in February.

## Of Peacekeepers and Pandemics

BY JEAN-PIERRE LACROIX

The COVID-19 pandemic is also developing in countries marred by armed conflict. In an op-ed featured in *Le Monde*, the head of United Nations Peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, underlines the role UN peacekeepers can play together with Member States.

Op-ed. No one, no community, no country, is immune from this deadly pandemic. This is a crisis of global dimensions, with devastating human, social and economic impacts as we have seen from what is already happening around the globe. As the head of UN Peacekeeping, I am particularly concerned about those areas where COVID-19 will intersect with armed conflict.

People in already fragile political environments, where individuals are living in conflict-affected or post-conflict societies with little to no infrastructure or social and sanitary safety nets, are especially at risk. How do you wash your hands without access to clean water? What now for women who pay a disproportionate toll as frontline responders and caregivers, and who could lose their ability to feed their families because of collapsing economies?

And what if, on top of all of this, people are living under the threat of armed groups or terrorist acts? Just as the body cannot defend itself as well with a compromised immune system, populations that are deprived of functioning health systems and support networks are even more vulnerable to the pandemic and its consequence. The same can be said for the places where our peacekeepers operate—vulnerable civilians there are the most at risk.

United Nations peacekeepers are not the remedy for COVID-19, but in many places they are a part of the treatment plan. Peacekeeping operations must be able to continue their work and to maintain operational capability, so we can deliver on our life-saving mandates—promoting conflict resolution and protecting the populations we serve, as well as our UN personnel.

In countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Mali and South Sudan, where peace is fragile and populations have already suffered too much, our missions are supporting state authorities and other partners. Following World Health Organization guidance, we continue to patrol while applying social distancing rules and we have stepped up our use of online resources.

We are continuing to provide what direct assistance we can including by protecting humanitarian supplies and depots. Our aircraft are flying at a time when many others are not. As always, this is a partnership. The Member States who provide our police and military personnel are working with us to suspend or postpone planned deployments and rotations.

It is time to silence the guns

Having the blue helmets stay on the ground to help counter this pandemic is an important step in



helping host countries tackle this challenge. In this regard, we need the support of our Member States now more than ever, in line with the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative which remains at the core of our work. Their willingness to stand firm in their commitment to peacekeeping operations is central to our ability to assist.

On the ground, we quickly added additional precautionary measures including quarantine and containment of incoming personnel in cooperation with host country authorities. Our missions are also working closely with national authorities to support their response. We are providing multi-faceted support: we are facilitating remote communications thanks to our technological means, we are helping to ensure critical supply chains are maintained, and our personnel are raising awareness on the coronavirus within communities, through local radio and digital media platforms, as well as during patrols.

The fight against this deadly virus--our common enemy--requires all of us to be united and act together. All the UN peacekeepers who are currently deployed deserve our gratitude and support; these women and men continue to serve under the blue flag in the cause of peace, in conditions even more difficult due to COVID-19.

Thanks to them, efforts to consolidate peace have not weakened, despite this virus which they are helping to fight. On March 23rd in New York, the UN Secretary-General stated that "it is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives", calling on warring parties around the world to commit to a global ceasefire. Our missions have spread this message and we are repeating it now—it's time to silence the guns.

\*\*\*

*Jean-Pierre Lacroix is a French diplomat who currently serves as the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations. This op-ed was initially published in French in Le Monde on April 2nd, 2020.*



## Qom Governor-General Calls for Swift Return of Indian Citizens

QOM (IRNA) - Bahram Sarmast, the governor-general of the Iranian central province of Qom, called for accelerating the return of Indian citizens to their home country.

In a meeting with Indian ambassador to Iran Gaddam Dharmendra on Sunday, Qom governor-general said that the Indian citizens residing in the holy city of Qom

have been settled in 50 different accommodations.

Sarmast said that with the spread of the coronavirus disease in Iran in late February, the settlement and quarantining the Indian citizens in the hotels of Qom, as well as rendering treatment services to the patient ones were put on the agenda of the Iranian officials.



## Bangladesh PM Unveils 72,750-Crore Taka Economic Package

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday announced stimulus packages to the tune of Taka 72,750 crore (USD 8,573 million) to counter the adverse effects of coronavirus on the country's economy.

"Earlier I declared Taka 5,000 crore (emergency) incentive package for paying salaries and allowances of export-oriented industry workers and employees and today I am announcing four fresh financial stimulus packages of Tk 67,750 crore," she said.

In a nation-wide, televised address from her official Ganobhaban residence on Sunday, the premier said with the fresh allocations the total amount of financial assistance would stand at Tk 72,750 crore, which is nearly 2.52 per cent of GDP.

"I hope our economy will rebound and we can reach near the desired economic growth, if the stimulus packages -- the previous and the fresh ones -- are quickly rolled out," she said.

The premier said the government has simultaneously taken up four programs under the work plan which are to be implanted in immediate, short and long" phases to increase public expenditure mainly through employment generation, introduce stimulus packages and widen social safety net coverage

This was Hasina's second media appearance in four days over the coronavirus outbreak following a videoconference meeting with officials and public representatives across the country.

The premier said the first of the four packages involves Taka 30,000 crore to be provided to affected industries and service sector organisations as working capital through banks as low-interest loans.

She said the commercial banks would provide the amount as loans from their own funds to concerned industries and enterprises on the basis of bank-client relations.

The premier said the government would pay half of the interest amounts to banks as subsidies to the affected enterprises, which would pay the rest of the interest.

"The interest rate of this lending facility will be 9 per cent and the concerned industries and business organizations will pay 4.50 per cent interest, meaning half of the interest of that loan, she said.



Hasina said under the second package small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including cottage industries, would get Taka 20,000 crore as working capital.

She said a mechanism would be devised to send the amount to the SMEs as low-interest loans through banks which identically disburse amounts to the SMEs on the basis of bank-client relations while the government in this case would bear the greater share of the interest amount.

"The interest rate of this lending facility will be 9 per cent and the concerned industries and business organizations will pay 4 per cent interest of that loan, while the government will provide the remaining 5 per cent as subsidy, the premier said.

The premier said the other package was meant for enhancing Bangladesh Bank's Export Development Fund (EDF) to grow from USD 3.5 billion to USD 5 billion to facilitate raw material import. The premier said this last package would result in adding up Taka 12,750 crore (USD 1.5 billion) to the EDF while its interest rate would simultaneously be brought down to 2 per cent.

## Indian Companies Expect Lower Sales, Profit



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - Indian companies are expecting that revenue will fall by 10% and profit by 5% in the current April-June quarter as well as the just concluded January-March quarter on Covid-19 impact along with significant job losses, according to a survey released by an industry body on Sunday (April 5).

The Covid-19 (coronavirus) outbreak and the subsequent country-wide lockdown has deeply impacted India's economy with a majority of the companies expecting demand to decline and employment to get impacted, according to the online survey of chief executive officers (CEOs) representing 200 companies conducted by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

About 47% of the companies expect less than 15 percent job-loss while 32 percent companies expect to shed between 15-30 percent jobs, once the lockdown ends, the statement said.

"The government could announce a fiscal stimulus package for the industry and implement it on fast track mode, given that the sudden imposition of the lockdown has significantly impacted industry operations and the uncertainty of a recovery threatens substantial loss of livelihoods going forward," said Chandrajit Banerjee, director general of CII.

Around 80% of the CEOs have claimed that their inventory was lying idle while over 40% of them expect their stocks to last beyond a month once the lockdown ends indicating the demand to slowdown in post lock-down period.

India, which has 3,030 active cases of Covid-19 and 77 deaths as per official data, is currently under a three-week lock-down that ends on April 14.

Last week, rating agency Fitch in its report said India's economic growth could hit a 30-year low of 2% in 2020-21 (Apr-Mar).

## Spain's PM Pleads EU for Coronabonds Crisis Funding

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez urged the EU Sunday to issue "coronabonds," controversial pooled debt instruments to help the bloc's hardest hit countries fund their battle against the devastating economic impact of the pandemic.

Sanchez's call in Germany's conservative broadsheet Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung came after his Italian counterpart Giuseppe Conte made a similar plea this week in another newspaper of Europe's biggest economy.

Their campaign targeting German readership is no accident -- Chancellor Angela Merkel has so far been firmly against such joint bonds, fearing that fiscally disciplined nations would be forced to pay for excesses by less frugal nations.

Yet within Germany, calls are growing on her to relent, with some in her center-right party CDU too sympathising with the hard-hit EU neighbors.

"It is time for the mutualisation of debts," Sanchez wrote in Sunday's edition of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

"This is the time to act in solidarity -- by setting up a new mechanism for mutualising debt, by acting in unison in procuring essential medical equipment, by establishing coordinated strategies against cybercrime, and by preparing a large-scale master plan for a rapid and solid recovery of the continent," he said.

Such joint action would mean "that there are no gulfs between North and South... (and) that no one is left behind," he urged.

Italy and Spain, backed by France and some key EU officials have been pushing for coronabonds which would allow hard-hit countries to raise funds on the financial markets under the umbrella of the EU.



Proponents argue that this would lower their borrowing costs and mean that they could raise funds without singling themselves out as broke.

Germany, like other northern EU members including the Netherlands, has repeatedly dismissed the idea as an attempt by over-spending southerners to take advantage of the cheap borrowing rates enjoyed by

states with balanced budgets.

Merkel's government is instead looking at using the European Stability Mechanism bailout fund, which German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said could be activated "with no senseless conditions" to help struggling states.

The ESM, set up at the height of the eurozone debt crisis in 2012, helped fund the massive bailouts needed then but its aid normally comes with strict and often burdensome conditions.

For Sanchez, the ESM could help in a first step by ensuring a financial lifeline to economies in trouble.

"But it would not be sufficient in the medium term," wrote the Spanish leader.

"The challenge that we are faced with is immense and unprecedented. It requires an unanimous, extreme and ambitious response in order to preserve our economic and social system."

Debate over the coronabonds is heating up with euro area finance ministers slated for talks Tuesday to chart the bloc's next steps in battling the economic fallout from the coronavirus.

In an editorial this week, Spiegel magazine accused Germany of "lacking solidarity, being small-minded and cowardly" by rejecting its fellow EU members' calls.

## S. Korea to Post Negative GDP Growth Due to Coronavirus

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea is likely to post negative economic growth this year due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, data showed Sunday.

The average estimate of the nation's gross domestic product growth for this year recently came to negative 0.9 percent, drastically down from the previous suggestion of around 2 percent.

The forecasts were tallied from 11 global financial services firms, including Standard Chartered, UBS, Morgan Stanley, Nomura Holdings and Credit Suisse.

The plunge is attributed COVID-19, which has already claimed more than 63,000 lives around the world, the research firms said.

Even when excluding Nomura's remarkable contraction of 6.7 percent -- the most severe forecast of all -- the average still stands at a negative 0.3 percent, indicating a pessimistic consensus among market observers.

## U.S. Weaponizing...

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"These actions represent the type of international solidarity and show of humanity that the world needs right now," he said.

"Sadly, the federal government in Washington is demonstrating the very opposite at this time. It is accurate to say that the U.S. is weaponizing the virus against these countries."

Due to the illegal U.S. sanctions, Iran has been paying a heavy price because of the pandemic. The Islamic Republic is "reportedly the only country in the world that cannot buy medicines needed to fight the pandemic."

According to reports from Iran, one person is dying every 10 minutes, "the US government will bear a great deal of moral and legal responsibility, for it is knowingly contributing to the spread of the pandemic in Iran," Stone said.

Likewise, the outspoken Hollywood director condemned U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to maintain, and in some cases, to increase economic pressure on countries like Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua as the virus is straining healthcare systems across the planet.

## Iranians Need...

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"The (U.S.) president says one thing, the state secretary says something else, other people in charge of Iran affairs go their own way, and there are also various ideas in Congress. What matters is that the sanctions are cruel and illegal, as the entire world acknowledges this," Mousavi added.

Iran has already expressed its stances and called for the removal of all sanctions, but the call has been against the bullying nature of the U.S. officials and reveals that Americans are looking for an excuse, he said.

The spokesman warned the international community that a failure to stand against the U.S.' unilateral and bullying policies would cause problems for other countries sooner or later.

"The Americans did not show mercy even to their friends and allies. Any financial or spiritual assistance to the U.S. in imposing sanctions against other countries will one day grip them (the sponsors) as well," he added.

He also said that INSTEX launched by the EU states carried transactions for medical and emergency supplies, adding that Iran expects the EU partners to implement other commitments to Iran as well.

Mousavi said interactions can be done through INSTEX, but it is not the all commitments to Iran the EU states have undertaken.

He said that Iran is under the strictest sanctions and despite the U.S. claims that drugs and medical equipment are exempted from sanctions, but they have been blocked to enter Iran. Mousavi went on to say that more than 30 countries and international organizations helped Iran over coronavirus campaign.

Mousavi hoped in the video conference that the New Year would be a year of peace and prosperity for the people of Iran and that the country would be victorious against all the challenges, including coronavirus outbreak, extremism, violence, and sanctions.

He hoped that the domestic and powerful nuclear technology of Iran will have a huge progress and be used for peace, welfare and security of Iran and the region.

He sympathized with the people of 200 countries that are fighting with coronavirus pandemic and said that according to Iranian world-famous Saadi, "Human beings are members of a whole -- In creation of one essence and soul," adding that Iranians cannot have calm when the entire humanity is in pain.

## HRW...

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While the Islamic Republic is battling the fast-spreading outbreak, the Trump administration refuses to ease up its "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

Although, the US claims that it has exempted humanitarian supplies from the sanctions, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has cut the number of its so-called "general licenses" for Iran-headed exports from more than 50 percent to 10 percent, HRW said.

It also refuses to expand the licenses so they could include more items, it added.

"This means that equipment crucial to fighting the virus, including ventilators, CT scanners, decontamination equipment, and full-mask respirators, require a special license," the body wrote.

International banks and companies balk at engaging in business with Iran for fear of being punished by the bans, the organization warned.

## Iran to Have Blocked...

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Rabiei said that Iran's success to access new hard currency sources was a blow to the United States and its "unethical" policy of refusing to ease the sanctions even at a time of increased pressure on Iran because of a pandemic.

He also dismissed reports in some media outlets suggesting that the IMF had rejected Iran's request for a \$5-billion emergency loan under pressure from the US.

"We have yet to hear anything about rejecting the request for this loan, there has been some statements but whether the fund (IMF) has made a decision or paid any attention (to those statements), we haven't heard anything," said the spokesman.

## Pakistani Speaker...

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Earlier Chairman and deputy Chairman of Pakistan's Senate expressing solidarity with the people and government of Iran on coronavirus outbreak prayed for early recovery of Speaker Ali Larijani.

Majlis' News Department in a statement on Thursday said that Speaker Ali Larijani has been tested positive for coronavirus and is in quarantine.

After certain symptoms emerged, he underwent coronavirus testing and he tested positive for COVID-19. He is currently in quarantine receiving medical treatment.



## Smolov Breaks Spain's Lockdown to Return Home

MADRID (Reuters) - Celta Vigo's Russia international Fedor Smolov has flouted Spain's lockdown to return to his home country, becoming the second Celta player to break the rules of the state of emergency to fight the coronavirus, Spanish newspaper AS reported.

Citing a club source, AS reported that Celta said Smolov had asked permission to return home for personal reasons but they could not grant it as La Liga did not authorise his request.

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## Leclerc Is Also a Winner for Ferrari

LONDON (Reuters) - Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was a dominant winner on his Formula One esports debut on Sunday while World Cup-winning England cricketer Ben Stokes brought up the rear in a virtual Vietnam Grand Prix.

The 28-lap race was the second in a series organised to provide some entertainment for fans starved of real-life action due to the new coronavirus pandemic that has stalled most sport worldwide.

# FIFA Draws Up Guidelines to Tackle Pay-Cut Complaints

MANCHESTER (Reuters) - FIFA is getting ready to deal with complaints and appeals over wage cuts for players, producing guidelines for clubs and football bodies looking to cut costs during the stoppage caused by the coronavirus pandemic, an internal document seen by Reuters showed.

The issue of pay cuts for players has exploded as a major controversy in England while in other countries, such as Germany and Spain, players have accepted temporary reductions in earnings.

With football halted across the globe, however, FIFA is aware that it may well have to deal with a series of different agreements and possible complaints, and its guidelines urge any cuts to be "proportionate".

FIFA's Coronavirus working group met last week and agreed on a wide range of issues, summarised in the document, including that player contracts due to run out in June should be extended to the end of any resumed season.

The internal paper notes that such decisions will inevitably reflect national law and specific agreements in each country but says it is keen to avoid large discrepancies between similar leagues and clubs. It also urges clubs, leagues and players to reach "appropriate collective agreements".

The guiding principles behind such deals should be to "guarantee some form of salary payment to players and coaches, avoid litigation, protect contractual stability, and ensure clubs do not go bankrupt, while considering the financial impact of COVID-19 on clubs".

Crucially, the document states that where clubs and employees cannot reach agreement and where "national law does not address the situation or collective agreements are not applicable", unilateral decisions to change contracts "will only be recognised when they are otherwise deemed reasonable" by FIFA's Dispute Resolutions Chamber or Players Status Committee.

A "reasonable" contractual change will take into account the economic situation of a club, the proportionality of any salary amendment and the net income of the employee after that amendment, FIFA writes in the document.

FIFA will also take into account whether the decision applies to the entire squad or only specific employees, and whether the club attempted in good faith to reach a mutual agreement with its employees.

The FIFA document summarising the working group's views will be submitted to the Bureau of the FIFA Council for approval.



A FIFA spokesman said it was not in a position to comment as a proposal was being made to the Council, and "we cannot pre-empt that decision".

The coronavirus working group is composed of representatives from across the game including the FIFA administration, confederations, national federations, the European Club Association (ECA), players union FIFPRO and the World Leagues Forum.

The group also offered an alternative approach in which "all agreements between clubs and employees should be 'suspended' during any suspension of competitions provided proper insurance coverage is maintained, and adequate alternative income support arrangements can be found for employees during the period in question."

The group agreed that transfer windows should be adjusted to reflect the changed dates of seasons, with priority given to teams finishing the current season with their existing squad.

FIFA has also ruled that planned new restrictions on loan deals will not come into effect until the end of the current period of uncertainty surrounding the game due to the pandemic.

## Walker Faces Disciplinary Action For Breaking Lockdown Rules



LONDON (Reuters) - Manchester City defender Kyle Walker faces disciplinary action from the Premier League champions after tabloid the Sun said he breached Britain's lockdown rules by hosting a party during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Sun said England international Walker, 29, had also invited two call girls to the party at his Cheshire home last week, shortly before he had urged people on Twitter to follow government guidelines on social distancing.

Walker apologised for his actions in a statement to the newspaper on Sunday, saying he had let down his family, friends, club, supporters and the public.

"Manchester City FC are aware of a story in a tabloid newspaper regarding the private life of Kyle Walker in relation to a breach of the UK lockdown and social distancing rules," City said in a statement released to British media.

"Footballers are global role models, and our staff and players have been working to support the incredible efforts of the National Health Service and other key workers in fighting the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus, in any way we can.

## UEFA Denies August 3 Deadline to Complete Champions League



LONDON (Reuters) - UEFA has denied there is an Aug. 3 deadline to complete this season's Champions League after a report by German broadcaster ZDF quoted the body's President Aleksander Ceferin as saying the competition had to be finished by that date.

"It has been reported that UEFA President, Aleksander Ceferin told ZDF in Germany that the UEFA Champions League must finish by 3 August. This is not true," said a statement from European soccer's governing body.

"The President was very clear not to set exact dates for the end of the season."

Soccer leagues across Europe and beyond have been suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Champions League has stalled with the round of 16 yet to be completed.

"UEFA is currently analysing all options to complete domestic and European seasons with the European Club Association and the European Leagues in the working group set up on 17 March," the UEFA statement said. "The primary priority of all the members of the working group is to preserve public health.

"Following on from that, it is to find calendar solutions to complete all competitions. Options are currently being studied to play matches in July and in August if needed, depending on restart dates and the permission of national authorities."

## Handling of Premier League Pay Row "a Disgrace"



LONDON (Dispatches) - Wayne Rooney has criticised the government and the Premier League for placing footballers in a "no-win situation" over proposed pay cuts after a warning from players' representatives that National Health Service coffers could suffer.

The former England captain, now playing with Championship side Derby, penned an impassioned column in the Sunday Times saying his fellow professionals were "easy targets" in the wider response to the coronavirus crisis.

Rooney made it clear he had both the means and the will to make financial contributions, either in the form of salary reductions or direct donations to the NHS, but felt the public pressure being exerted on players was unhelpful.

The Premier League's suggested strategy involving a combination of pay cuts and deferrals amounting to 30 percent of wages, was discussed in a conference call with players' and managers' representatives on Saturday.

Initial talks were already ongoing before key political figures, including Health Secretary Matt Hancock, called for action.

"If the government approached me to help support nurses financially or buy ventilators I'd be proud to do so -- as long as I knew where the money was going," wrote Rooney.

## Sri Lanka T20 Team Need Fine-Tuning

LONDON (Dispatches) - (Reuters) - Sri Lanka's Twenty20 squad needs some adjustments, said coach Mickey Arthur, who will be overseeing the team's bid for a second 20-overs World Cup title later this year.

In home fixtures last month, Sri Lanka swept a three-match one-day series against West Indies but lost two Twenty20 Internationals.

"Our T20 side is still going to take some fine-tuning and this was amplified against a very strong West Indies team that simply had too much power for us," Arthur said in a chat with Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) media unit.

"I think the most important thing is building a method to win games based on the resources that you have at your disposal and then making sure that the players are under no illusion as to what that method is based on our strengths," he said.

The 2014 champions will be chasing their second 20-overs world title in Australia in October-November.

Since Arthur took over in December, Sri Lanka have lost a test series in Pakistan but prevailed in Zimbabwe earlier this year. A sterner test had awaited them in a two-match home series against England, but that was cancelled last month owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Pressure Grows For Shortened IPL Behind Closed Doors

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Players are putting pressure on cricket authorities to plan a shortened Twenty20 Indian Premier League later in the year to "kickstart" the sports economy after the coronavirus lockdown.

The world's richest cricket tournament has been postponed until April 15, which coincides with the end of India's 21 day nationwide shutdown to halt the spread of the pandemic.

But with the number of cases and deaths rising and India isolated from international travel, few believe any sport will be possible in the sub-continent for at least three months.

"Let's say July-August is the earliest," said Kevin Pietersen, the former England batsman.

"I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I think every single player around the world is desperate to play the IPL," he said on Indian broadcaster Star Sports.

Pietersen suggested the eight-team tournament be shortened from its normal eight-week duration and played behind closed doors.

"There could be a way in which to get some money into the franchises, into the economy by having a situation where you use maybe three venues which are completely closed to fans," said Pietersen.

"And the players can still go out and play the tournament in three weeks or in four weeks.

