

Deputy Health Minister Kamel Taqavinejad Says the World Bank Will Provide Iran With a \$50-Million Loan to Support Iran in Fighting the Coronavirus

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Ambassador to Brussels Thanked Iranians Living in Belgium For Their Financial Assistance in Purchasing the Medical and Health Equipment Needed by Iranians in Fight Against the Coronavirus

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2

DOMESTIC

Tehran, Doha Agree to Work Together in Energy, Investment Domains



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Iran Exports Plunge by 20% Due To Coronavirus



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

N. Korea Flouts Sanctions Through China Shipping



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Vettel Dismisses Back-to-Back Racing Overload as "Not Realistic"



> SEE PAGE 8

President Mulls Over Restarting Medium-Risk Businesses

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani urged the Ministry of Health to cooperate with the Security and Social Committee of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus to determine the conditions for reopening of medium-risk businesses and presenting them to the National Task Force.

In a meeting with the heads of specialized committees of the National Task Force for Fighting the Coronavirus on Saturday, Hassan Rouhani said that evaluations on the implementation of the Smart Social Distancing plan in provinces nationwide for a week, indicate people's relatively satisfying cooperation.

"People's cooperation with the implementation of the Smart Social Distancing plan has reduced the spread of the disease in some provinces and established a steady trend in other provinces," the President noted.

President Rouhani went on to add, "This situation is based on the estimates of the agencies and committees of the National Task Force for Fighting the Coronavirus as a result of the support and observance of health protocols by businesses last week, and of course, according to the mentioned statistics, a significant part of the people have observed health guidelines and were committed to the motto of 'Stay Home' and did not leave home except for necessary situations".

See Page 7

Iran Records Lowest Death Toll of Coronavirus

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - After five consecutive days of the Coronavirus death reduction, on April 18, Iran records the lowest number of deaths with 73 people after days with 3 digit casualties.

Ministry of Health Spokesman announced that so far more than 55,987 COVID-19 patients have recovered from the disease and reported a decrease in daily death toll for the 6th consecutive days with 73 deaths.

Kianoush Jahanpour Announced that so far, 80,868 people in the country have been infected with the Coronavirus, 5,031 people have died and 55,987 patients have been recovered.

Jahanpour on Saturday on the latest data of the Coronavirus in the country said: "According to the definitive laboratory findings and from yesterday to April 18 Thursday, 1,374 new patients with COVID-19 were diagnosed in the country and the number of patients with this disease reached 80,868."

See Page 7

Army Equipped With New Drones



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's defense ministry has made mass delivery of new combat and surveillance drones, including a jet-powered multipurpose UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) to Army's Air force and Air Defense Force.

The event took place during an official ceremony at the Iran Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO) in Isfahan with the presence of Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami and other senior military officials, a day after Iran's Army Day.

Speaking during the ceremony, Hatami said that the multipurpose jet-powered UAV could travel at speeds of 900 kmph and conduct operations at an altitude of 12 kilometers.

He added that the drone can fly for up to 180 minutes and have a range of 1000 kilometers.

The drones can fly up to 40,000-45,000 feet that is considered a good flight altitude, he noted, adding that they can operate within a radius of 1,500 kilometers. "These drones will help to have a safer Iran and perform air defense operations with more power," he highlighted.

During the ceremony, a large contingent of Ababil 3 and Karar drones was also delivered to the Air force.

Speaking about the Ababil-3 drone, Hatami said that the drone is a medium-range surveillance craft capable of conducting airstrikes within a 150 kilometer radius.

He also said that the Karar drone is a strategic combat drone which can deliver payloads comparable to manned aircraft. He added that the drone has pin-point attack capability and can be used in suicide attacks.

Iran has taken great strides seeking to attain self-sufficiency in producing essential military equipment and defense systems in the face of decades-long US sanctions and arms embargoes on the country.

Earlier this month, Iran announced that it is planning to produce a 6,000 ton destroyer later this year.

Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi says Iran plans to build nuclear-powered submarines given the growing threats facing the country from the sea.

According to a statement by Iran's Navy commander last week, Iran is also considering the development of nuclear-powered submarines.

U.S. Bid for Strategic Dialogue With Iraq to Get Nowhere

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A former Iranian ambassador to Baghdad said the U.S. plan for strategic dialogue with the Iraqi government will not meet with success unless Washington shifts its policy of pressures and threats and seeks to establish healthy relations with Iraq.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi said there is no chance of success for the US' idea of holding strategic dialogue with the Iraqi government in June 2020. "I believe that there won't be any new dialogue, and no new development is to happen."

The ex-envoy said Iraqis would agree to establishing genuine relations with the U.S. only if Washington respects the interests of Baghdad, otherwise they will strongly oppose the U.S.' call for dialogue especially if Washington ignores the Arab country's interests through pressures and threats.

"I believe that a new strategic dialogue will not take place unless the Americans seek a proper presence in Iraq, and this will be possible when Washington abandons its illegitimate objectives," Kazemi Qomi said.

"But, considering that the U.S. has an aggressive nature, I believe that such a thing will not take place and the (American) threats and allurements will not work."

The former Iranian ambassador went on to say that the U.S. once adopted a strategy to widen the social gaps in Iraq in order to take control of the Arab country's security situation, adding, "The U.S. that once claimed it had come to Iraq to establish security is now gripped by insecurity itself, because it was the Americans who created terrorist groups, including Daesh (ISIL), in Iraq and confessed to doing so later."

Kazemi also stated that the U.S. favors an Iraqi government that would not implement the bill on the withdrawal of American military forces.

One of the White House's main concerns is to prevent Iraq's close relations with its neighbors, including with Iran, he said.

"Today, Iraq's security and defense power are based upon people, but the Americans are trying to undermine Iraq's defense strategy. This would strengthen the chance of American interference (in Iraq)," he concluded.

Iranian Co. Replaces Canadian Supplier In Telecom Industry

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian knowledge-based company has replaced the Canadian supplier in the country's telecommunications industry by producing a "channel simulator".

A device called a channel simulator is a piece that telecommunications industry generally used to purchase from a Canadian company. With the purchase of the company by an American company and the imposition of sanctions and a ban on sales, an Iranian knowledge-based company undertook to manufacture the device.

Soroush Akhlaqi Esfahani, CEO of Amvaj System Company, said that this part is used in the country's telecommunication system to test performance of modem. This piece was not previously produced in the country, and domestic demand was often met by purchasing from a Canadian company. The Canadian company was bought by an American company and they were no longer willing to sell the device to Iran along with other products.

The technology activist stated that by raising the issue in the R&D unit and with the help of the country's scientific and academic resources, manufacturing the device was put on the agenda.

Iran's Main Stock Exchange Records Biggest Daily Jump Ever

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's main stock exchange the TSE has recorded its biggest daily jump as main index in the market tops an all-time high of 668,320 points.

Reports in the local media said Tehran Stock Exchange main index TEDPIX rose by 23,219 points on Saturday, a surge of 3.49 percent compared to figures recorded at the end of the previous day of trade in the market.

The biggest gains on shares were recorded for Mobarakeh Steel (MSC), Iran National Copper (NICICO) and Mapna Energy, said the reports.

TSE's price index, known as TEPIX, also rose 3.52% to hit 233,507 points, as 5.7 billion shares changed hands in more than 804,000 number of trades.

Trades on Saturday added another \$380 million to TSE's total value, bringing it to over 25,000 trillion rials (nearly 157 billion).

The figures recorded the strongest one-day performance for the TSE in history, said the local media reports.

See Page 7

16-Year-Old Iranian Shocks World No.1 Chess Player

TEHRAN (Dispatches)- Alireza Firouzja defeated the Norwegian 8.5-7.5 in the final of the Quickfire quick elimination online contest – where players must verbally comment on their moves, and their opponents, during play – to claim the prize of \$ 14,000.

The Iranian is the second youngest player to reach the 2700 International Chess Federation (FIDE) classification – the classification which governs the international chess competition.

After 7 months and 131 matches, the three-minute series of matches involving 128 competitors ended in a final between the world champion since 2013 and the rising superstar.

Before the confrontation, the world n° 1 did not underestimate Firouzja, calling it "by far my biggest challenge".

Firouzja first gained fame when he came second behind Carlsen at the World Blitz in Moscow in December.

And after losing the 90-minute competition, Carlsen paid tribute to the teenager, calling him "incredibly strong".

"Good game, Alireza! It was really horrible, I was just in great shape, but he deserves all the credit", said the 29-year-old during the live broadcast.

See Page 7



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Iranians' Innovation Registered at USPTO

TEHRAN (IRNA) -The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) registered innovation made by researchers of Iran's University of Science and Technology.

Students and professors who could register such an international success were from chemical and oil and gas faculties at the University of Science and Technology, according to University report.

They, after about ten years of research, could successfully present a new catalyst for the desulfurization of liquid hydrocarbon fuel. The University of Science and Technology founded in 1929 in Tehran introduces itself as one of the foremost technical schools in the country.

Tehran, Doha Agree to Work Together in Energy, Investment Domains



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran and Qatar have agreed to work together in the fields of energy and investment, and to seriously pursue mutual economic cooperation after the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic is over.

The agreement was made via video conference by Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian and Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari in a bid to take the opportunity to further enhance reciprocal ties.

It came after a meeting of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission was put off due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The meeting was scheduled to be held in the central Iranian city of Isfahan in April, 2020.04.

In the video-conference meeting held on April 16, 2020, the two sides discussed issues of mutual interest and some decisions were adopted.

"On the Iranian side, all documents and draft papers to be discussed and approved at the [Iran-Qatar] Joint [Economic] Commission have been prepared, and they will be shared with the Qatari side, so that issues will receive final approval by both sides before a meeting of the joint commission is held," Ardakanian told Al Kuwari, who is the Qatari head of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission.

The Iranian and Qatari heads of the joint commission agreed to hold a meeting of the commission the first chance they get after the repercussions of the coronavirus outbreak are over, so that they can seriously follow up on the goals pursued by the commission to further boost mutual ties.

They also agreed to hold meetings via video conference in the meantime to discuss papers and documents they need to agree on to further advance issues at hand.

The Iranian minister also thanked Qatar for offering medical aid to Iran amid the coronavirus outbreak, and called for both countries to share medical experiences regarding the fight against the disease.

"Although the coronavirus has brought numerous hardships and problems for the human community, it has also had positive results, namely the strengthening of solidarity among friendly and neighbouring countries," said the Iranian official.

Iran, Turkey Interior Ministers Discuss Coronavirus Pandemic

TEHRAN (MNA) – Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli and his Turkish counterpart, Suleyman Soyulu in a phone talk on Saturday discussed a host of issues of mutual interest, including their country's fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Iran's Ambassador in Ankara Mohammad Farazmand said in a tweet that Rahmani Fazli and Soyulu had held a talk earlier on Saturday, during which they exchanged views on "the measures and experiences of the two countries in curbing the coronavirus disease, and other issues including the mutual cooperation on border security and fight against terrorism."

Earlier this week, Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held a meeting with Turkish Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Derya Örs, calling for evermore strengthening of the cooperation between the two neighbors.

He said Iran's medical staff and physicians are ready to share their experiences with neighboring Turkey in the field of combating coronavirus, adding, "Joint cooperation between Iran and Turkey in battling the disease is of paramount importance."

Also on April 7, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed cooperation in containing the outbreak.

Six Anti-COVID19 Products Unveiled

TEHRAN (IRNA)- The international complex of technology and innovation of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences and Health Services unveiled six Iranian-made products for preventing and treating coronavirus.

During the unveiling ceremony, Iran's Vice-President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari passed through the walkthrough disinfecting gate and his body temperature was also measured by the device.

Sattari said coronavirus statistics in Iran show good performance of technology and innovation in this field.

He added that Iranian knowledge-based companies and the human resources that are active in this field have had a



timely and good performance.

Most of the products were made for fighting coronavirus.

The walkthrough disinfecting gate has the ability to measure body temperature and oxygen in the blood.

The ozone generator has also been unveiled which is able to disinfect the air and to produce ozone in an onsite mode.

Lack of need for chemicals, replacement of hospital autoclaves, and not leaving a stain on the equipment, surfaces, and clothing are other characteristics of the device.

Shield nano, molecular coronavirus test kits and an application for food, safety, and coronavirus were also unveiled.

Coronavirus Removes Anti-Terrorism Mask Off U.S. Sanctions' Face

TEHRAN (IRNA) -Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said that coronavirus pandemic disclosed the reality of the US sanctions and removed the anti-terrorism mask off its face.

"The truth is that coronavirus, removing the anti-terrorism mask off the sanctions' face, disclosed an ignored dimension of them to the public opinion in the world. With all its evil and horrible nature, the virus indicated that the victims of the sanctions are the very ordinary Iranian people and a nation's will to life is far greater than one can label it as terrorist or expansionist," Rabiei wrote in an article in the Persian-language daily 'Iran' published on Saturday.

Rabiei further noted that Iran's rightfulness regarding Human Rights and diplomacy has challenged the fake legitimacy of the sanctions so that the anti-Iran lobbies are scrambling to deny the reality of them.

Those people, according to the spokesman, hide behind U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim that "Iran has failed to invest in its health system"; but Iran's health infrastructure and its hardworking staff during the pandemic proved the emptiness of such claims, Rabiei added.

"The death and war lobbies use such expressions as 'government-made coronavirus' as they're afraid of the legality of sanctions being questioned by the world public opinion even in the West and America itself," he went on to say.

This was seen in a televised debate in which Richard Nephew, former U.S. State Department sanctions official who was also among the architects of Iran sanctions, questioned the inhumane image of the sanctions, according to Rabiei.

He stressed that many NGOs, including special decess communities and those working in the field of child labor and the disabled, made a lot of efforts to shout out the difficulty of procuring special medicine under the sanctions pressure.

Government spokesman underlined that the fight against sanctions should not be considered an international political issue, because it is concerned with the lives of workers, retired people, the poor and elderly Iranians.

Iran Always Supports Rights of Palestinian Nation



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani held separate phone talks with the head of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)'s Political Bureau and the Secretary-General of the Islamic Jihad Movement of Palestine and emphasized on the Islamic Republic's support of the rights of Palestine.

Following the infection of Iran's Parliament Speaker with the coronavirus, the head of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)'s Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh and the Secretary-General of the Islamic Jihad Movement of Palestine Ziyad Al-Nakhalah wished him well, calling him as the supporter of the resistance movement in the region.

"As the world grapples with coronavirus, the fact that the Zionist regime and the United States have not yet lifted the siege of Gaza and sanctions against Iran proves their inhumane nature," Ali Larijani said in his talks with Ismail Haniyeh.

Larijani stressed that the Palestinians must use all their legal and human resources against the criminal actions of the Zionists, adding: "The post-coronavirus world is an opportunity to reconsider the rights of nations and restore human identities, and the system of domination must learn from humanitarian crises to change its behavior."

Speaker of Iran's Parliament, in separate talk with Ziyad Al-Nakhalah, expressed hope that they would win the fight against the Zionist regime as soon as possible.

Health Ministry Receives Budget to Fight Coronavirus

TEHRAN (IRNA)- A high-ranking official of Iran's Ministry of Health said on Saturday that the Planning and Budget Organization has provided the Ministry of Health with 3050 billion tomans to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Kamel Taghavinejad said in a video press conference that 1,200 billion tomans of the money will be given to the medical universities to purchase the equipment they need from Iranian companies.

Taghavinejad said that 40 billion tomans have already been provided for the universities by benefactors, adding that a ticker symbol has been defined on the stock market to gain the trust of the people.

He said the gains of Corona1 go to the medical universities and the gains of Corona2 go to the health system of the country, adding that President Hassan Rouhani had allocated 200 billion tomans for those who were fighting the virus at the frontlines, which was paid last month.

He also said that the Iranian diaspora has also helped, and ever since 2005, the World Bank gave us a loan – 50 million dollars, adding that another 130 million euros were loaned by Islamic Development Bank.

Adventurers Not Allowed to Make Any Wrong Move Against Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri on Friday warned adventurers against taking any wrong move, saying that the enemies' satanic plots are doomed to failure as they were before.

"We will not allow any wrong thing to be made by adventurers and greedy people against this land," he reiterated in a message marking Army Day on Friday.

The great day which in fact marks the birth of the Islamic Army and is a turning-point in the history of the Army's mission in defending the independence and territorial integrity of the country, as well as a meaningful synergy with the other armed forces, especially the Islamic Republic Guard Corps (IRGC), is reminiscent of the late founder of the Islamic Revolution Imam Khomeini's intelligent and historic message which nipped in the bud the enemies' plots to eliminate the army.

Shining the role of the devoted Army in creating defense and deterrence capacities signifies a steady and scholarly struggle associated with divine faith and bravery in stepping in difficult areas of defense technologies, he said.

The commander hailed the Army's stunning achievements in all fields, saying that the Army played a crucial role in reining in the coronavirus pandemic.

Armenian PM Thanks Iran for Continuation of Trade During Pandemic

TEHRAN (MNA) – Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan expressed his appreciation to some of the neighboring countries, including Iran, for continuing trade and fulfilling the country's needs during the pandemic.

"An for this I want to thank both our businessmen and our Georgian, Russian and Iranian partners, who spare no efforts for ensuring cargo transportations from and to Armenia in the best possible way", Armenpress quoted him as saying on Friday.

One of the important features of the coronavirus pandemic in Armenia is that the phenomenon of empty showcases in groceries did not occur here, PM Nikol Pashinyan said in his April 17 address, noting that unfortunately in many countries it happened.

The state of emergency has been prolonged until May 14 in Armenia. Strict restrictions are imposed on the people's movement.

The PM noted in his address that the COVID-19 outbreak is under control in Armenia.

Azerbaijan's Aid to Iran Causes Positive Response

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Allocation of \$5 million by the Azerbaijani government to fight the coronavirus in Iran has caused a great positive resonance in the country, Iran's Ambassador to Azerbaijan Javad Jahangirzadeh told Trend.

According to Jahangirzadeh, Azerbaijan and Iran have more than 750 kilometers of land border, and it is natural that every event affects the relations between the two countries.

Jahangirzadeh added that such events lead to increased cooperation and rapprochement between the two countries. The peoples and states never forget each other's needs in their difficult days, and the tragedy of the spread of the coronavirus is no exception.

"We have witnessed the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity in contacts and talks between high-ranking officials. Undoubtedly, these difficult days will be over. Mutual visits of citizens of the two countries will return to normal," he said.

Iran is one of the countries heavily affected by the rapidly-spreading coronavirus. According to recent reports from the Iranian officials, over 79,400 people have been infected, 4,958 people have already died. Meanwhile, over 54,000 have reportedly recovered from the disease.

The country continues to apply strict measures to contain the further spread. Reportedly, the disease was brought to Iran by a businessman from Iran's Qom city, who went on a business trip to China, despite official warnings. The man died later from the disease.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:59
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:54
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:24

68. If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature:
Will they not then understand?
69. We have not instructed the (Prophet) in Poetry, nor is it meet for him:
this is no less than a Message and a Qur'an making things clear: Surah 36. Ya-sin (68 - 69)

Iran Exports Plunge by 20% Due To Coronavirus

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization says Iran's exports have fallen by 27% since the outbreak of the Coronavirus as the WTO had predicted it for international trade.

Hamid Zadboom, by referring to the World Trade Organization's recent report and prediction about the future of the international trade after the outbreak of the coronavirus, said that closure of factories, restrictions for passengers and drivers and restrictions on exports by the countries are the major reasons for the slump in the international trade.

He added that almost 15 neighboring countries account for almost 60 percent of Iran's exports, adding that Iran has land border with 7 countries and marine border with 8 more countries.

Zadboom added that in such a condition and lockdown in countries, it is natural that the volume of trade falls and according to the WTO prediction, the trade will slump by 13 percent in the optimistic and 32 percent in the pessimist condition, admitting that Iran's exports have fallen by 20 percent.

On the imports of raw material, intermediary and essential commodities, he said



since January 26, the value of imports stood at \$8b which is the same as the figure registered for the same period last year because those trades are done through ports.

He added that land border with Afghanistan is open and only 3 borders from 9 borders of Iraq are currently open. He also said that trade with Turkey is done via railway and land border is still closed.

He added that the volume of trade since January 26 till April 3 fell by 20 percent in terms of weight and 27 percent in terms of value.

Zadboom went on to say that the government has approved incentives for exports for the current year which will worth some 600b toman.

He also called for boosting infrastructures for transportation especially railway which is very important for exports.

He reiterated helping exporters in transportation will be a great incentive for them to increase their exports.

Zadboom added that talks with Kuwait have begun for expanding trade while talks with Qatar for boosting trade are underway.

Arfasazan Has High Capacity to Serve Copper industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Arfasazan Company hailed the CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) for his support which helped the company materialize its programs last year, adding that currently Arfasazan functions under Ofogh Copper Investments Company.

Eng. Mohammad Hossein Zeinli hailed managing director of NICICO Dr. Saad Mohammadi for helping Arfasazan Co. to materialize its programs, adding that the company by owning 120 heavy and semi-heavy machines and 300 experienced staff carry out projects which are in direct relation with production line and it enjoys high capacity for offering various services to the industry and developmental projects in Kerman Province.



He added that one can find few companies in the province with such diverse services, adding that Arfasazan was established with a goal to carry out construction activities, road construction, installations, installing industrial equipment and crane services, and providing heavy machineries and lift-trucks.

Zeinli noted that the company has experienced team who know the market very well in order to reduce the cost of

operations and to be competitive in the market.

He added that some machineries of the company were renovated last year and the company has plans to boost the performance of its staff by holding training courses.

He reiterated that the company's programs for the current year are to continue the project of integrating the resources and process of the organization to reduce expenses and to boost agility.

Indigenizing of Strategic Parts Grow by 18% in MSC

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Director of Indigenization Planning of Mobarakeh Steel Company says due to emphasis of senior officials of the company on indigenizing the production of strategic and important parts and equipment for production line, the indigenization trend witnessed 18 percent growth last year and the number of indigenized parts hit 1500 items.

MosayyebForoughi said that with investment of Mobarakeh Steel Company and with efforts of knowledge-based and manufacturing companies, the trend for indigenizing bore fruit successfully and growth in production in the company continued its way despite all restrictions and sanctions.

He added that the trend of indigenization of parts saved the country 1400b rials only in last Iranian calendar year. He added that more than 82 percent of parts and equipment needed by the company last year were provided by the domestic market, stipulating that this issue is important because all financial resources for the manufactured parts were based on rials.

He noted that in the last four months of last year, 164, 160, 159 and 184 items of needed parts were indigenized respectively in cooperation with the domestic and knowledge-based companies.



He also said the company received some honors and medals and it presented its products for the first time on Iran Mercantile Exchange.

He also admitted that the company faced some restrictions and challenges last year for providing raw material, adding that the company produced over 2.5m tons of melted steel which shows 5 percent growth comparing to the preceding year.

Yazdizadeh added that the company witnessed 14 percent growth in production of agglomerate, 2.5 percent in production of dry, 6 percent increase in production of crude steel and 5.5 percent growth in the total production of main products of the company.

He further said the company also produced 1.25m tons of coke last year which is a new record for the country.

He concluded that the company besides setting record for annual production of melted cast iron with two long furnaces, it set records for monthly production of 244144 tons and daily production of 9657 tons of melted cast iron with two long furnaces.



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

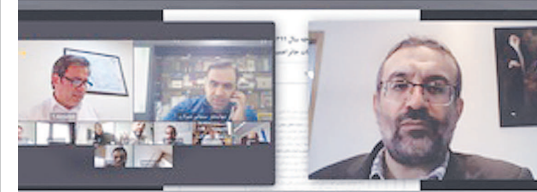
ESC Exports Up by 28%

TEHRAN – The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESC) Eng. Mansour Yazdizadeh says the company in last Iranian calendar year increased exports of its main exports to 1.154m which showed 28 percent growth comparing to the preceding year which was 900,000 tons.

He added that the company had many achievements last year like registering the highest sales (delivery) in its history last year and also registering its highest record of monthly sales worth 1137b toman in its history which was set in March. He noted that the tonnage for delivery of by-products of Esfahan Steel Company was around 2.622m tons last year.

Yazdizadeh also pointed to the presence of the company in two new European and one new Asian markets, adding that this happened while the country is under sanctions. He further said that the company succeeded in extending its CE Marketing certificate.

IDRO Ready to Cooperate With Private Sector in Projects in Deprived Areas



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) announced the organization's readiness for cooperation with private sector and cooperatives in the projects in the deprived areas.

Speaking on the sidelines of the council of deputies of IDRO, Mr. Mohammad Baqer Aali said the organization's approach in the year of surge in production is a joint opportunity for the government, private and cooperatives sectors to operationalize goals of surge in production in the deprived areas.

Aali said that investors of private sector and the cooperatives will at least own 51 percent of the total shares in the projects and they will actually have agile management and own the project and they can gain experience for cooperation with the oldest developmental organization of the country.

He further said that one of the advantages of this joint cooperation is that IDRO's partners in the projects can enjoy getting forex or rial banking facilities which has been stipulated in the national budget law.

He added that this year's budget law has given this opportunity for those investors who cooperate with IDRO in the deprived area to enjoy forex and rial facilities if they own more than 50 percent of the shares.

Aali reiterated cooperation between government, private and cooperatives sectors is the best solution for materializing the slogan of the surge in production.

He noted that IDRO can hand over its total shares to the cooperatives and private sectors in such joint projects three years after the projects come into effect.

Bonab Steel Co. Eyes Setting New Record for Production



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Mahan Holding details measures taken by the holding to materialize the slogan of the year in practice, adding that the Bonab Steel Industry Complex last year set a new record for production and it eyes setting a new record for the current year.

Sadeq Jahed Khatibi said that last Iranian calendar year, which had been named Year of Pick-Up in Production, witnessed a significant increase in production and set a new record for Bonab Steel Industry Company since its foundation and the company produced 493,000 tons of steel ingots or sections which posted 45 percent growth comparing to the preceding year.

He added that Bonab Complex produced 144,000 tons of inducted steel ingots which improved its former record of 126,000 tons. He added that melting arc 150mm of the company after one year came back to the production line, and the company by producing 125,000 tons of arc steel ingots improved its previous record of 121,000 tons, and totally the company posted 112 percent growth in production comparing to its preceding year.

Jahed Khatibi who is also caretaker of Bonab Steel Industry Complex added that the company enjoyed 5.6 percent growth in production last year because of having several rolling lines and facilities for producing different types of steel.

He added that the company has taken measures to reduce production cost, adding that last year, the record of 404 tons of production per person was set which is a good figure.

He noted that this year and in order to materialize the slogan of surge in production, the company is to boost its production and to boost its exports in order to earn forex and the approach of the company will be export-oriented one.

Bonab Steel Industry Company is one of the affiliated bodies of Mahan Mines and Industries Holding.

Libyan Gov't Forces Attack Haftar Militia

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Libyan government forces on Friday attacked locations of militias loyal to warlord Khalifa Haftar in western Tripoli.

The UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) military spokesman Mohammed Kanunu issued a statement on developments of Operation Volcano Rage and said there was an air raid on the Al-Watiya airbase controlled by the militia.

Haftar's locations were attacked after militias carried out strikes on civilian settlements using rockets that killed five and injured 18. The Health Ministry spokesperson said a university dormitory allocated to the settlement of migrants in Libya was targeted by Haftar militias.



Italy Declares Victory Over Covid-19 in Poorer South

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian health officials declared victory Friday over the coronavirus in the poorer southern regions, where hospitals had been stretched to breaking point under the strain of the pandemic.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte had warned six weeks ago that Italy's ability to conquer COVID-19 depended on whether cases can stay largely contained to the richer north.

The disease has now officially claimed 22,745 lives in the Mediterranean country of 60 million people -- a toll second only to the United States. But Italy has still counted itself relatively lucky because the outbreak erupted in provinces with the best equipped medical staff around the financial capital Milan.



N. Korea Flouts Sanctions Through China Shipping



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - North Korea sharply stepped up trade in coal and oil products last year in defiance of UN sanctions through the apparent help of China's shipping industry, a UN panel said Friday.

The annual report to the UN Security Council by sanctions experts went online and inexplicably disappeared later in the day, with the text itself noting China's reservations about the findings.

Publishing photographs, shipping logs and submissions from member-states, the panel said that North Korea had violated the total UN prohibition on exporting coal as well as restrictions on imports of refined petroleum.

"The continued violation by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of commodity export bans not only flouts Security Council resolutions but serves to fund a revenue stream that has historically contributed to the country's prohibited nuclear and ballistic missile programs," the report said.

The panel, quoting data from an unspecified country, estimated that North Korea exported 3.7 million tons of coal between January and August last year, grossing around \$370 million. Most coal exports were transferred from North Korean ships to Chinese barges, which often sailed up the Yangtze River to make deliveries, it said.

In a new development, North Korea has also been spotted sending coal into the ocean for pick-up on self-propelled barges that are easier to evade detection, the report said.

As North Korea's fleet is not known to include such barges, they are likely from China, with 47 shipments from May to August last year directly reaching ports on China's Hangzhou Bay near the economic powerhouse of Shanghai, it said.

The report said that the North also far exceeded a UN restriction on importing more than 500,000 barrels a year in refined petroleum.

Citing the United States as its source, the panel said North Korea had imported more than 3.89 million barrels of refined petroleum products between January and October 2019.

China is North Korea's primary political and economic ally and had backed UN sanctions out of frustration with Pyongyang's nuclear and missile tests.

But Beijing has since called for an easing of sanctions after leader Kim Jong Un froze long-range missile and nuclear test launches following three meetings with US President Donald Trump.

The United States has insisted on maintaining sanctions as leverage, although Trump has voiced admiration for Kim and recently sent him a letter with a plan to revive ties, according to the two countries. The UN panel in February released a summary of its conclusions, but the more exhaustive report was delayed.

Pompeo Tells Lavrov Any New Arms Control Talks Must Include China

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told his Russian counterpart on Friday that any future arms control talks must focus on an American proposal for a new arms control accord that includes Russia and China, the State Department said.

Pompeo emphasized in a telephone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that "any future arms control talks must be based on President (Donald) Trump's vision for a trilateral arms control agreement that includes both Russia and China," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugus said in a statement.

China, whose arsenal of an estimated 300 nuclear weapons is far smaller than those of Russia and the United States, has rejected such talks. Ortugus said Pompeo's comments came as he and Lavrov discussed "next steps in the bilateral Strategic Security Dialogue, taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic".

Trump last year proposed that the United States, Russia and China negotiate a new pact to replace the 2010 New START accord that cut deployed U.S. and Russian nuclear warheads and the bombers and land- and submarine-based missiles that carry them to their lowest levels in decades.

New START will expire next February unless the sides agree to extend it for up to five years. Russia has said it would be willing to extend the accord, but the Trump administration has declined to state a position.

The Russian foreign ministry said Lavrov had "reiterated the Russian proposal to extend the START treaty, due to expire in February 2021", in his conversation with Pompeo. ("On the call) it was underlined that Russia is ready to work on possible new nuclear weapons agreements, but that it would be important to preserve... the START treaty while preparations are ongoing," the ministry said in a statement.

U.S. administration officials argue that China must be brought into any new arms control pact because of the growing threat they say is posed by its nuclear arsenal, which is undergoing a modernization program.

Arms control experts, however, have described Trump's proposal to include China in a new treaty as a "poison pill" strategy to kill New START and end restraints on U.S. nuclear arms deployments.



Bolsonaro Defends Sacking Health Minister Amid Pandemic

BRASILIA (AFP) - Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Friday defended his decision to restart economic activity in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, after sacking his health minister over differences in how to tackle the disease.

Luiz Henrique Mandetta, the dismissed health minister, had been advocating social distancing in line with World Health Organization recommendations, with the virus outbreak claiming more than 1,900 lives so far in Brazil.

But the far-right Bolsonaro has argued that the measures would wreck the economy and create greater long-term risks to public health.

"This struggle to start opening up for business is a risk that I will take," Bolsonaro said Friday as he installed his new health minister, Nelson Teich.

If the epidemic "gets worse, that will be on me. But I think -- and lots of people are coming to realize this -- that we have to open up."

The governors of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro were moving in the opposite direction on Friday, however, extending partial quarantines in their states which only allow key economic activities to go on. Bolsonaro sacked Mandetta after weeks of public clashes over how to contain the deadly outbreak.

"Mandetta's vision was that of health, of life. Mine is more than life, it includes the economy and jobs," Bolsonaro said. Teich, a renowned 62-year-old oncologist, did not propose any concrete measures in his brief inaugural speech, but insisted he would strive to balance both outlooks.

"We can talk about health, the economy, it doesn't matter: at the end of the day we are talking about people. That is what we are here to do, to bring a better life to Brazilian society and people," the new minister said.

Nevertheless, Bolsonaro himself admitted he lacks the power to force his vision on states' governors, who have the authority to impose their own measures against the virus. As of Thursday, 1,924 people had died of coronavirus in Brazil, a country of more than 210 million.

Chile Unrest Simmers Under Pandemic Lockdown

SANTIAGO (AFP) - Six months after the largest social unrest in 30 years broke out, the streets of Chile are calm once again as the coronavirus pandemic forces the country into lockdown.

But experts say the underlying frustration and social inequality that sparked the mass demonstrations have not disappeared and are merely simmering under the surface, potentially ready to explode again once virus measures are lifted. A mass movement against President Sebastian Pinera and his government erupted on October 18, initially triggered by a modest rise in metro fares in Santiago before mushrooming into general dissatisfaction with the cost of living and a system that seems to benefit the rich at the expense of all others.

For the last month, though, the epicenter of the protests in Santiago's Plaza Italia, as well as other hotspot cities such as Valparaiso and Concepcion, have gone cool with the population barred from heading outside to prevent the spread of the deadly COVID-19 disease.

"The problems, whose public expression is currently suspended, are still there," Patricio Zapata, a constitutional lawyer and member of the opposition Christian Democratic Party, told AFP.

Faced with a health crisis that has left more than 110 dead and over 9,200 infected, Pinera actually has the wind in his sails.

His approval rating plunged to less than eight percent in January -- with weekly protests raging -- but has climbed again to almost 20 percent.

The good news may not last, though.

"We're in something like a parenthesis, and there's the chance that after the parenthesis, things will return to a similar situation" that existed before the unrest erupted, said Juan Pablo Luna, a professor in the political science institute at the Catholic University of Chile.

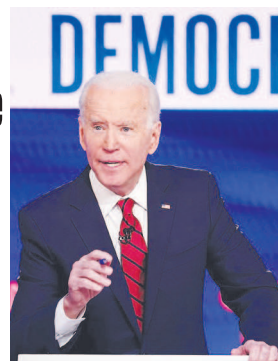
But "that will only happen if the consequences of the crisis are such that the people prefer to postpone their demands in order to satisfy basic needs in economic terms," said Luna.

The inescapable economic downturn that the pandemic will wreak led the International Monetary Fund to warn that countries such as Chile, Ecuador or France "remain vulnerable to new protests, particularly if policy actions to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis are perceived as insufficient or as unfairly favoring large corporates rather than people."



Global virus deaths at 154,000; US cases at 700,000; Live updates

Biden Says Trump Failed To Hold China Accountable On Coronavirus



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Americans are paying the price for President Donald Trump's failure to hold China to account over the coronavirus pandemic, presumed Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden said on Friday, as the two campaigns spar over who can better confront challenges posed by Beijing.

Trump's campaign has moved swiftly to mine Biden's nearly five-decade record as a senator, vice president and presidential candidate for fodder for attacks related to China, an issue that has emerged as a major battlefield for the campaigns ahead of November's election.

A pro-Trump political action committee, America First Action, on Thursday unveiled \$10 million in new attack ads against Biden in the battleground states Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, casting the former vice president as friendly to China's ruling Communist Party, while highlighting Trump's decision in January to ban travel from the country after the coronavirus outbreak started there.

Biden's allies have welcomed the fight, arguing that Trump undermined U.S. disease control protections and allowed the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus that first emerged in China but has now killed more than 35,000 people in the United States, more than in any other country.

"The uncomfortable truth is that Donald Trump left America exposed and vulnerable to this pandemic. He ignored the warnings of health experts and intelligence agencies and put his trust in China's leaders instead," Biden said in a video ad posted online.

Biden said Trump ended funding for a program created under the Obama-Biden administration to track emergency infectious diseases, cut Centers of Disease Control and Prevention experts in China by two thirds, and left empty a slot for an American official within China's disease control agency.

"And now, we're all paying the price," he said.

Democratic political group American Bridge 21st Century Foundation unveiled the "first wave" of a \$15 million anti-Trump advertising campaign on Friday, rolling out ads also in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

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J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Vanak Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
4bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2200) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, balcony, F.F
Zaferanieh (\$1800) 160sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, balcony, F.F
Gheitarieh (\$2400) 220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, balcony, F.F

Darrous (\$1800) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, balcony, pkg, F.F

Jordan (\$1500) 2bdrs, F.F
Jordan (\$2000) 3bdrs, F.F
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EU Annual Inflation Down in March

LONDON (Dispatches) - The EU's annual inflation stood at 1.2% this March, down from 1.6% in February, the bloc's statistical office said on Friday.

In March 2019 the EU's annual inflation rate was 1.6%.

"Compared with February, annual inflation fell in 26 member states and rose in one," the Eurostat said.

The lowest annual rates were seen in Spain, Italy, Greek Cypriot administration, and Portugal (all 0.1%), while the highest rates were in Hungary, Poland (both 3.9%), and the Czechia (3.6%).



China's Economy Shrinks For First Time in Four Decades

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economy contracted for the first time in decades last quarter as drastic measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic brought activity to a standstill, official data showed Friday.

Gross domestic product shrank 6.8 percent in the January-March quarter from the same period a year earlier, according to figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

It was the first negative growth reported by the world's second-largest economy since Beijing began logging quarterly data in the early 1990s.

The figure marks a sharp drop from China's six percent expansion in the fourth quarter of last year, but was slightly better than the 8.2 percent contraction forecast by economists in an AFP poll. Economists have long harboured doubts about the accuracy of the official Chinese data, however, suspecting that the numbers are massaged for political reasons.

And analysts have warned of tougher times ahead, with weaker external demand for Chinese goods to weigh on growth as key export markets are battered by COVID-19.

"We are now facing rising pressure in the prevention of imported epidemic infections, as well as new difficulties and challenges for resuming work and production," NBS spokesman Mao Shengyong told a press conference.

Full-year GDP growth expectations have fallen to 1.7 percent, according to AFP's poll -- the worst annual performance since 1976. The International Monetary Fund has pegged China's 2020 full-year expansion even lower at 1.2 percent but predicts a strong rebound to 9.2 percent in 2021.

It has also painted a grim picture of the global impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, forecasting the deepest economic contraction since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Friday's data showed a 1.1 decline in industrial output for March, reflecting lingering damage from factory shutdowns even as travel restrictions in the country were progressively eased and businesses stirred back to life.

Retail sales also plummeted 15.8 percent last month as many consumers stayed home and avoided crowds due to fears of a resurgence in virus cases.

But the urban unemployment rate dropped slightly to 5.9 percent last month, after surging to 6.2 percent in February. China has set an ambitious target of eradicating extreme poverty and building a "moderately prosperous society" by the end of 2020, but this is increasingly under threat from the pandemic fallout.

"Public records suggest that at least half a million firms were dissolved in the first quarter and more are likely to close shop," said Capital Economics chief Asia economist Mark Williams in a report this week.

Surveys pointed to more layoffs in March, and unemployment will likely remain higher in the coming months, he said. Some analysts believe the worst has passed for China but still expect a slow recovery.

Williams said depressed demand in foreign markets could reduce Chinese exports -- which account for 15 percent of national GDP -- by as much as half. The impact on export demand may have shaved 1.8 percentage points off China's real GDP growth in the first quarter, Nomura's chief China economist Lu Ting said earlier.

U.S. Leading Economic Indicators Post Record 6.7% Plunge in March

LONDON (Dispatches) - The numbers: The collapse of the U.S. economy because of COVID-19 is becoming more evident by the day, the latest sign a record 6.7% decline in the leading economic indicators in March.

The closely followed index, published by the U.S. Conference Board, measuring the nation's economic health tracks 10 indicators, most of which showed sharp deterioration last month. New jobless claims posted a record surge, for instance, and stock prices plummeted.

The steep drop in the 60-year-old index shattered the prior record of a 3.4% decline in October 2008, when a financial panic plunged the U.S. into its deepest recession since World War Two.

The decline is all but certain to be even worse in April -- probably a lot worse. The economy only started shutting down in the second half of March as the states and federal government ramped up efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

"Recession, if you hadn't guessed," noted Scott Brown, chief economist at Raymond James.

What happened: The leading economic index showed deterioration in the economy across the board, the Conference Board said Friday.

The board has predicted the economy will shrink by as much as 7% in 2020 in light of all the damage caused by the viral outbreak and frantic efforts to contain it. Already a record 20 million American have applied for unemployment benefits.

Big picture: The U.S. economy is hurting badly, as is the rest of the world, and a global recession is already here. How long it last and how much worse it gets depends on whether nations succeed in slowing the spread of the virus.



Kazakhstan Eyes Asia Start-Ups as Coronavirus Hits Oil Price

LONDON (FT) - Kazakhstan's government will invest in start-ups across south-east Asia as part of efforts to diversify central Asia's largest economy away from oil and gas, where prices have been slammed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The country's state wealth fund, Baiterek National Managing Holdings, will be the anchor investor in a vehicle run by Singapore-based Quest Ventures. The fund has also been backed by Pavilion Capital, which is owned by Temasek Holdings, Singapore's state investment company.

At \$50m, the fund is small but it forms part of a broader push to create an economic corridor between central and south-east Asia. Adil Nurgozhin, chairman of Baiterek subsidiary QazTech Ventures, called the deal an "important step" in connecting the regions' economies.

Kazakhstan, sandwiched between regional powers China and Russia, is looking to diversify its portfolio investments into different parts of the world, according to people familiar with the situation.

The move into venture capital comes as oil-rich economies, such as those in the Middle East, have sought to broaden their revenue sources against a backdrop of volatile crude prices and a broader shift away from fossil fuels.

Oil and related industries make up about 40 per cent of Kazakhstan's gross domestic product and its economy has been hit by a recent slump in crude prices and the coronavirus outbreak.

Kazakhstan's government was previously linked with an investment in Japanese conglomerate SoftBank's second Vision Fund, which could have given the country exposure to technology start-ups across the globe. However, that vehicle was permanently frozen this week after SoftBank warned of a \$16.7bn loss for its first Vision Fund.

Lockdown Exits Will Need More Open Borders

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - European Union (EU) countries will need to ease border restrictions to let in cross-border and seasonal workers as they gradually pull out of lockdowns and relaunch their economies, the commissioner for jobs said on Friday.

The EU's executive Commission issued guidelines to the 27 member states in March, urging them to let critical frontier workers, such as in the health or food sector, cross borders. Some 1.5 million people live in one EU country and work in another.

Jobs and Social Rights Commissioner Nicolas Schmit told Reuters from Luxembourg the situation had improved after many countries' initial reflex to close frontiers, but problems remained.

"One of Luxembourg's biggest neighbours, more in the east, they have just closed a few border points to enter Luxembourg, which means people have to cross 25-30 km to go to another border point," he said, in a reference to Germany. "This is just a reflex, which doesn't add anything to health security."

Data on truck crossing times from logistic services company Sixfold show long queues in eastern Europe - between Bulgaria and Romania and into Hungary - as well as into Switzerland, also a large recipient of cross-border workers.

Schmit said he understood the need for health controls, but border restrictions had to be proportionate and not discriminate against workers living in different countries.

"Now the moment has come really when we have to be in conformity again with the principles of the Schengen code," he said, referring to the 26-country European area which normally has no border checks.

"Now we are in a new phase of exit, companies are restarting and so it is not acceptable that workers living in that member state can go to work and the cross-border workers cannot."

Schmit said the EU executive was talking to governments to find a solution, including to establish how seasonal farm labourers, also identified as critical, could travel to plant or harvest crops. Local people would not have the skills that the largely eastern European workers possessed.

Up to 80,000 seasonal workers are due to arrive by plane in Germany in April and May, but hundreds of thousands are needed across the bloc. Schmit said a major issue was provision of accommodation that allowed social distancing.

Schmit, whose EU brief includes minimum wages and rights for platform workers, said the crisis had taught people that professions they might not have regarded highly in the past were important and deserved adequate pay. "No way are these issues that have been pushed away," he said.

Oil Demand Won't Bounce Back Anytime Soon



LONDON (Oil Price) - Oil demand is expected to be down by nearly 30 million barrels per day (mb/d) in April and down by almost 10 mb/d for the entire year, according to the latest estimates. But some forecasts still optimistically assume that demand bounces back in the second half of the year, a scenario that may not come to pass.

Since February, investment banks repeatedly revised down their numbers with each passing week. It took until April for the consensus to arrive at a temporary demand hit of 25 to 30 mb/d. However, many forecasts still assume the global economy rebounds after the second quarter in a "V-shaped" recovery.

For example, the IEA's latest Oil Market Report, released on Wednesday, painted a dire portrait of global demand, but it nevertheless assumes that there is a resurgence in demand close to normal levels by the end of the year.

But there are multiple reasons why the global economy may not return to anything close to "normal" even by the end of 2020.

One of the principle reasons should be an obvious one -- the global pandemic is far from over. The rate of infections in Europe and in some parts of the U.S. has flattened, sparking calls to lift stay-at-home orders. But glimmers of hope may be misleading. "The problem is that most countries have an overall infection penetration below 5%. The moment the restrictions are relaxed the daily infection rates will spike back up again," Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB, said in a report.

"Thus, rather than moving from 'deep-freeze lock-down' in Q2 and then directly to 'all-back-to-work' in Q3 we are more likely going to move to 'semi-lock-down' as well as repeated start-stop, start-stop moves going forward as governments try to ease restrictions but then must pull back again as infection rates revives again," Schieldrop warned.

SEB agreed with the broader consensus that the low point for oil demand will be April and May. But the bank said that demand won't simply bounce back after that. "Covid-19 is basically still ahead of us. The road to oil demand normality may thus be much more muted than V-shaped," Schieldrop concluded.

Current WTI and Brent futures assume \$40 per barrel in 2021, based largely on the hopes of a V-shaped bounce back. Schieldrop said that there is a "high risk" that the optimism surrounding a V-shaped recovery will be dashed in the next two months, which could reset price expectations for the next year or two.

The second reason why demand may not bounce back (and obviously related to the first) is that the global economy is in trouble. Just days ago President Trump said the economy would "boom" once the lockdown measures are lifted.

But a new working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research says that U.S. GDP could contract by 11 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020, year-on-year.

Saudi Aramco to Supply Full May Crude Volumes to Some in Asia



SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, has notified some refiners in Asia that it will supply full contractual volumes of crude in May, four sources with direct knowledge of the matter said on Friday.

State-run Saudi Aramco said on Friday it would supply customers in the kingdom and abroad with about 8.5 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude, reducing output in line with a global pact on reducing production to cope with falling demand.

OPEC and allies including Russia, a group known as OPEC+, have agreed to cut output by 9.7 million bpd in May and June after oil prices hit 18-year lows amid a supply glut due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Aramco has allocated about 4 million bpd of crude to Asian customers, about 2 million bpd lower than its full contractual volumes in the region, said a Saudi oil source familiar with the company's plans.

Although there has been no change in the volume of oil supplied to some Asian customers, Aramco has altered the ratio among its crude grades by increasing Arab Light quantities and reducing those of Arab Heavy, the first four sources said.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, is expected to cut production by 2.5 million bpd in May and June from a baseline of 11 million bpd, under terms of the supply deal.

Saudi Aramco has made deep price reductions for crude it sells to Asia in May after fuel demand and complex refining margins in Singapore DUB-REF-SIN slumped.

The price gap for Arab Light and Arab Heavy is at its narrowest ever at 10 cents a barrel, traders said, reflecting poor demand for light grades, which yield more gasoline and naphtha, products that have been badly hit by government measures to fight the virus outbreak.

The narrow price difference may encourage some refiners to process more light crude, one of the sources said.

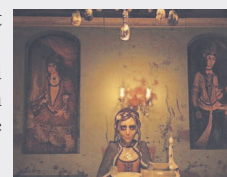
“Malakout” Goes to USA Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short animated piece ‘Malakout’, directed by Farnoosh Abedi, has been accepted into the competition program of the 50th Annual USA Film Festival in Dallas.

‘Malakout’ is about a piano player who tries to bring his wife back to life but the deal awakens the devil inside him.

‘Malakout’ has recently won the best animation award at the first edition of the Black Country Horror Shorts Film Festival in the UK.

It has also received the honorary diploma at the Silk Road International Film Festival (SRIFF) in Dublin, Ireland. The USA Film Festival is a Dallas-based, non-profit organization dedicated to the recognition and encouragement of excellence in the film and video arts.



Avigan: Antiviral Being Tested for Coronavirus Patients

PARIS (AFP) - It is approved for use in flu outbreaks and has been deployed to treat Ebola, but now Avigan is being trialled as a potential coronavirus treatment.

Here are some questions and answers about the anti-viral medication: What is Avigan?

Avigan is the brand name of the drug favipiravir. It was developed by what is now known as Fujifilm Toyama Chemical and approved for use in Japan in 2014.

But in Japan, it is only approved for use in flu outbreaks that aren’t being effectively addressed by existing medications. It is not available on the market and can only be manufactured and distributed at the request of the Japanese government.

Favipiravir works by blocking the ability of a virus to replicate inside a cell.

There are some safety concerns: it has been shown in animal studies to affect foetal development, meaning it is not given to pregnant women, and some doctors say they would not recommend it for children or adolescents.

How is it being used to treat coronavirus?

Some doctors began trying favipiravir to treat coronavirus patients early on, reasoning that its anti-viral properties would be applicable.

Some initial results suggested the drug could help shorten recovery time for patients, with China’s ministry of science and technology hailing it as yielding “very good clinical results”.

There are currently around five clinical trials ongoing in countries including the US, Italy and Japan, where Fujifilm announced it would be testing the drug’s efficacy on a group of 100 patients through until the end of June.

The Japan study will involve administering the drug for up to 14 days to patients between 20 and 74 with mild pneumonia.

Gaetan Burgio, a geneticist at Australian National University’s College of Health and Medicine, said the trials would be looking at a variety of factors.

They include clinical outcomes -- meaning effects on fever, cough, oxygenation, recovery time and time spent in hospital -- as well as how quickly the virus clears the system, along with x-rays or CT scans for pneumonia.

“If we see a significant reduction in clinical outcome and lower viral load from the favipiravir group, this would be a good sign for a larger-scale clinical trial,” he told AFP.

What sets these trials apart?

While doctors have already been experimenting with favipiravir for treating coronavirus patients, these trials will be conducted according to rigorous guidelines intended to ensure the drug is safe and effective across a broad range of patients.

“Smaller studies have been reported but it’s hard to draw conclusions from these as patient numbers are small and the trials often don’t compare versus (a regime of) best supportive care and placebo, more often to another drug,” said Stephen Griffin, a virologist at the University of Leeds.

“The big trials should be segregated according to disease severity and will compare to placebo.”



How does it compare to other drugs?

Scientists are studying a wide variety of drugs for possible treatment of coronavirus patients, including remdesivir, another antiviral.

One study of the two drugs as a treatment for coronavirus found favipiravir was only effective at relatively high concentrations, with remdesivir considered a better option, possibly in part due to the way coronaviruses replicate compared to other viruses, said Griffin.

But remdesivir is not yet licenced anywhere in the world and has to be administered intravenously via a drip, whereas favipiravir is approved in several countries and can be taken orally as a pill.

Japan has heavily backed the drug, asking Fujifilm to ramp up production for use at home and offering to supply it for free to dozens of countries that have put in requests.

When will we know if it works?

Fujifilm’s Japan and US trials will run until the end of June, with other data coming in from trials in Italy and elsewhere. Additional information will also be available from so-called compassionate use of the drug by doctors offering it to patients in non-study settings where other medication is not working.

But Burgio cautioned against high hopes.

“There are to date over 300 clinical trials underway for COVID-19. The expectations are very high for a miracle drug!”

“Let’s wait and see. However, rather than drugs, the best treatment against COVID-19 for now is social isolation, wash our hands and stay at home.”

Amazon Workers Call for Strike Over Covid-19, Climate Fears



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Amazon tech workers are calling for a virtual one-day strike to pressure the online retail giant over warehouse safety conditions during the coronavirus pandemic.

The e-commerce colossus has reportedly had COVID-19 cases in a number of its warehouses and has seen employee protests and walkouts in several of them to press for safety improvements.

Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, a group representing workers, urged colleagues to call in sick on April 24, accusing the company of firing workers protesting a lack of coronavirus precautions and environmental action.

“We’re asking tech workers to virtually walk out on Friday (April 24),” said Maren Costa, who US media reported was fired with fellow employee Emily Cunningham for criticizing Amazon over climate and coronavirus issues.

“We want to tell Amazon that we are sick of all this -- sick of the firings, sick of the silencing, sick of pollution, sick of racism, and sick of the climate crisis,” Costa said.

The virtual “walk out”, according to the group’s statement, would see workers take a personal day off at the same time. Amazon did not respond to a request for comment but U.S. media reported the company said the firings resulted from violations of “internal policies.”

The group also called for those fired for what they called “selective enforcement of policies and behavior guidelines” to be reinstated.

The Seattle-based internet giant set a goal of investing \$350 million to support employees and partners during the pandemic, which has thrust Amazon into the spotlight as demand surges for online services during extensive lockdowns.

Earlier this month, the company said it was creating its own lab to test employees for coronavirus.

In a stockholders letter Thursday, owner Jeff Bezos said Amazon had distributed face masks and was implementing temperature checks.

The call to strike came as Amazon France closed its French distribution centers -- key to preparing orders -- in response to a court order to limit deliveries to essential goods pending a review of COVID-19 safety measures.

South Korea Approves Extra \$6.3b Budget, Helps Families Hit by Pandemic

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The South Korean administration passed a new measure that will give middle-income and lower-income households another emergency relief worth 1 million won [US\$814].

The Ministry of Economy and Finance announced on Thursday, April 16, an extra budget worth 7.6 trillion won to help eligible households alleviate the impact of the coronavirus crisis.

The budget is reportedly higher than the original plan, which was 7.1 trillion won.

A day after South Korea President Moon Jae-in’s coalition won a parliamentary majority, the government proposed a new plan to distribute cash relief to 14.7 million households in forms of gift certificates, electronic cash, and shopping coupons.

The new measure targets to help households with four or more members—particularly those who earn below the 70% gross income—by offering cash aid worth US\$814 [AU\$1,280].

Eligible single-person, two-person, and three-person families will also receive help from the government.

For single-person households, they will receive 400,000 won. Two-person and three-person households, on the one hand, will receive 600,000 won and 800,000 won, respectively.

Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki promises that the South Korean government will mobilize all resources available and be decisive with their actions until the pandemic ends.

Additionally, the ministry clarified that they will not issue bonds to fund the program, but rather by readjusting this year’s annual budget.

He also said in his statement that the government will



consider other measures and that more spending should be expected.

“We will continue to consider additional measures to support the resiliency of our economy. Fiscal spending has to play an active role as the last resort of our economy.”

The second budget came a month after the National Assembly approved an

11.7 trillion won supplementary budget, which is also said to be the highest amount allocated to keep the country moving as the pandemic continues to wreck the global economy.

Despite all the measures laid out today, the South Korean government still expects the pandemic to put a massive dent into its economy. It is particularly true that the country is export-reliant, and many of its trading partners are struggling to stay afloat as well.

South Korea approves extra \$6.3 billion budget to help families hit by the pandemic

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said the country should expect its economy to shrink by 1.2% this year. South Korea’s economic growth last year was reportedly the slowest since 2009, with an increase of two percent only.

The country prepared plans last month to double the amount of emergency-financing aid package to 100 trillion to help hard-hit businesses as consumer demand slowed down, and the global economy is on halt.

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16-Year-Old...

FROM PAGE 1

“I just have to be better, but yes, he’s incredibly strong! Full credit.”

Firouzja was gracious in his victory.

“I think the game was 50:50,” said the teen, who is ranked # 21 in the world. “I don’t think I was preferred or he was preferred ... you should be lucky.”

Chess fans won’t have to wait long to see a rematch between the two, as they will face each other again on April 20 in the \$ 250,000 Magnus Carlsen Invitational.

The competition, organized by Carlsen, will oppose eight of the best players in the world against each other for the record price.

Earlier this year, Carlsen made history as he extended his undefeated streak to 111 successive classic games, breaking the 110 game streak established by Sergei Tiviakov in 2005.

President...

FROM PAGE 1

He called on the nation to adhere to the principles and pay attention to the health protocols.

The President noted, “The relevant bodies can use these estimates to provide their recommendations for the next step in the process of reopening medium-risk businesses for approval by the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus.”

He said that the Information and Publicizing Committee of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus should coordinate and plan for the country’s media, cyberspace and the IRIB by informing, educating and persuading people to follow the regulations and guidelines announced for business.

President Rouhani pointed out that the Ministry of Health must cooperate with the relevant agencies to have strict supervision and control over the observance of health rules and principles, along with educating the people.

He also said that the reopening of education centers under the auspices of the National Task Force for Fighting the Coronavirus depends on the conditions and control of the Coronavirus in the coming weeks, adding: “Therefore, the Ministry of Health must work with the Education Committee and the Social-Security Committee to implement the defined criteria and make a suggestion in this regard”.

“The Ministry of Health also has a mission to divide the provinces and cities of the country according to the defined and accepted global standards in three specific situations, and implement related protocols defined in the coming weeks,” Iran’s President added.

Stating that protocols must be defined precisely in the field of travel of Iranians abroad or foreign nationals whose travels are necessary, the President added: “The Ministry of Health should cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development to follow strict instructions”.

Iran Records Lowest Death...

FROM PAGE 1

The Head of Public Relations Center of the Health Ministry said: “Unfortunately, in the past 24 hours, 73 COVID-19 patients have lost their lives, so 5,031 people have lost their lives in the country to date.”

He stated, “3,513 patients are in a critical condition.”

So far, 330,137 COVID-19 diagnosis tests have been conducted in the country.

Meanwhile Deputy Minister for Development Management, Human Resources and Strategic Planning and Coordination of the Health Ministry Seyed Kamel Taqavinejad said that his country has succeeded in controlling coronavirus.

Taqavinejad in response to Iran Press regarding the extent that the development of the health system transformation plan as a key infrastructure is capable to ensure the health of the Iranians, especially during COVID-19 outbreak said: “Fortunately, sufficient and on time facilities and funds have been allocated to health section during 11th and 12th governments plus significant activities.”

“Approximately 1486 treatment projects with 3 million and 6,000 square meter infrastructure, 36,000 beds capacities, meaning 30 percent have been added to our hospitals’ sections, and it is significant in its own,” he added.

“Fortunately, Iran has succeeded in controlling the Coronavirus. The facilities have increased. 8 thousand hygienic projects have been put into operation during this government, as well as 17,000 old unites refurbished, 1 million and 170,000 square meters added to the country’s health section which is significant and effective to combat and control the Virus,” the deputy of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education said.

Iran’s Main Stock...

FROM PAGE 1

It comes several days after a major government-run investment holding, known as Shasta, launched its initial public offering in a subsidiary market of the TSE known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB) to attract 70 trillion rials, or around \$440 million, in new finances.

Saturday was a busy day for the IFB too, where there is a cap on trades for securities and other financial instruments.

Reports said a total of 1.77 billion shares were traded in the market with a value of nearly 3 trillion rials (\$187.5 million). That caused the IFB’s main index IFX to rise by 254 points to reach 8,438 points.

Investing in shares have become very popular in Iran over the past months as many businesses and households are no longer interested in low returns on gold or foreign currencies.

Laver Cup Postponed Until 2021 Due to French Open Clash

LONDON (Dispatches) - The fourth edition of the Laver Cup has been postponed from September 2020 to 2021 because of scheduling conflicts with other tennis events in a year disrupted by COVID-19, organizers said Friday.

The Europe v World men's team tournament had been scheduled for Boston from September 25-27, but those dates clash with the new dates selected by the French Tennis Federation for the postponed French Open, now scheduled for September 20-October 4.

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Pellegrino Returns to Argentina To Coach Velez Sarsfield

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Former Barcelona and Liverpool footballer Mauricio Pellegrino has been appointed coach at Argentines Velez Sarsfield, the club said on its social media, replacing former Manchester United and Real Madrid defender Gabriel Heinze.

"Mauricio Pellegrino is returning home! Welcome Flaco!" said Velez on its official Twitter account on Thursday night, using their former player's nickname.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SUNDAY APRIL 19, 2020

Vettel Dismisses Back-to-Back Racing Overload as "Not Realistic"

LONDON (Dispatches) - Four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel on Friday cautioned against the temptation to shoehorn too many Formula One races into a revised calendar, describing the move as "not realistic".

The 22-event F1 season has been decimated by the coronavirus with nine races either cancelled or postponed.

The French Grand Prix scheduled for June 28 is also in doubt as is the Belgian Grand Prix, set for August 30.

F1 chiefs have floated the idea of making up for lost time by staging races on successive weekends or even having two races on the same weekend.

However, Ferrari star Vettel fears such a move could lead to burnout for team staff.

"We drivers are a little privileged," Vettel told reporters by teleconference from his home in Switzerland.

"Of course, the races are tiring but there have to be limits for the staff. They must rest.

"We must also see if it is easy to reschedule races, if the circuits are not already taken. Many questions remain. I think the schedule will be busier, but 10 consecutive weekends is not realistic."

Vettel suggested that he would favour staging races without fans if it allowed a quick resumption as long as it did not become a common feature.

Other sports have already toyed with the idea of staging events behind closed doors.



Teams have agreed to lower the spending cap from \$175 million (161.4 million euros) to \$150 million.

"Clearly, some small teams are in danger and, as a family, F1 has to take care of its own," said Vettel.

Spending has not been the only talk in the sport.

There has also been speculation over Vettel's contract with Ferrari.

He penned a three-year deal with the Italian giants in 2017, reportedly worth around \$112 million.

There have been talks over an extension. However, those conversations took a twist after Vettel finished the 2019 championship behind new teammate Charles Leclerc.

"At the beginning (of the coronavirus crisis), the priority was to manage the situation in the best way and therefore the negotiations were put on hold," said Vettel.

"I think we are going to move forward but we do not have a specific deadline."

Whatever the outcome of the discussions, Vettel said he won't be revealing if he has been tempted to take a salary reduction.

Two weeks ago, McLaren drivers Carlos Sainz and Lando Norris said they had taken voluntary pay cuts as part of a raft of cost-cutting measures to help their team.

"Whatever happens, we will keep this decision to ourselves, as I have always done.

"I'm not going to use this to polish my image."

Italian Football Federation Hopes Play Resumes in Late May

ROME (Dispatches) - The Italian football federation (FIGC) said on Friday that club matches should resume "in late May, early June", saying those advocating cancellation of the season "do not like football, or Italians".

The president of the FIGC, Gabriele Gravina, said it would take three weeks to prepare after the end of the coronavirus lockdown in the country, currently scheduled for May 4.

"So at the end of May, early June, we can start," he told Italian radio on Friday.

"Those who talk today about cancelling the season do not like football or Italians, because they take away hope for the future and for recovery," Gravina said.

"There will be a monitoring period to guarantee the that all those taking part are free of the virus. If they are all negative, there is no problem of distancing or contagion," said Gravina.

"I hope that everyone will be able to play in their own stadium, if that is not possible we will find other solutions," he added.

"It's a complex moment for our country, for the economy and for football, which is one of the most important industries," he said, adding that he was confident "we will find the right way".

According to the Italian press, Brescia and Torino are the last two clubs to openly oppose the resumption of the league.

The city of Brescia is one of the hardest hit by the pandemic which has killed nearly 23,000 people in Italy.

Gauff Suffered Depression Before Wimbledon Breakthrough

LONDON (Dispatches) - Teenage tennis sensation Coco Gauff revealed that she suffered depression as a 14-year-old, just before her history-making Wimbledon breakthrough.

Gauff said she struggled with her mental health after being constantly touted as the sport's next big thing and even hailed as a new Serena Williams.

"Throughout my life, I was always the youngest to do things, which added hype that I didn't want," Gauff told the 'Behind the Racquet' website.

"It added this pressure that I needed to do well fast. Right before Wimbledon, going back to around 2017/18, I was struggling to figure out if this was really what I wanted.

For example, the US PGA Tour on Thursday announced plans to resume in June, with the first four tournaments being closed to spectators.

"It's complicated," admitted Vettel.

"On the one hand, there is the health of the sport, on the other, that of the people who work in the paddock and especially the fans.

"There are several options. No one likes to run in front of empty stands, but we will have to see if it will not allow us to resume much sooner.

"The first races will probably be a little different, but not too much, I hope, because we want to run in front of the fans."

Vettel insists that for him even a 10-race season is just as valuable as a 22-race campaign.

However, he admits that the damage to the sport caused by the coronavirus pandemic could be fatal for the smaller teams on the grid.

Without racing, the massive TV and sponsorship revenues have dried up.

Half of the teams have already started furloughing staff.

Premier League Clubs Committed To Finishing Season

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League clubs remain committed to finishing the top-flight season but did not set a June 30 deadline to complete the fixture list at a meeting on Friday.

With the English top flight on ice since mid-March due to the coronavirus, it had been reported that as many as nine clubs were keen to complete the campaign by the end of June.

But it is understood that the 20 clubs did not discuss wrapping up the remaining 92 Premier League fixtures by then when they met on a conference call with league chiefs.

With fears that failure to finish the season could cost the Premier League more than £1 billion (\$1.2 billion), clubs looked at various models for a potential return to action.

Britain is on lockdown until May 7 at the earliest to limit the spread of COVID-19, leaving English football to play a waiting game.

There is a general acceptance among clubs that matches will be played behind closed doors if the competition can resume, with restrictions on mass gatherings likely to remain in force for the foreseeable future.

A Premier League statement said a number of complex scenarios were being worked through.

"The health and wellbeing of players, coaches, managers, club staff and supporters are our priority and the league will only restart when medical guidance allows," it said.



De Bruyne Recovering From Illness

LONDON (Dispatches) - Kevin De Bruyne is recovering from an illness, but the Manchester City star says he is not sure if he had coronavirus.

De Bruyne and his family felt ill for around two weeks, but the Belgian international did not find out whether or not it was the virus.

"I am doing well, to be honest," De Bruyne told Sky Sports on Friday.

"The first two weeks my family was sick so it was a little bit like up and down, but now they are all healthy.

"We don't know if we had it (coronavirus) or not but I think we're doing well now."

With De Bruyne recovered, the midfielder is trying to keep as fit as he can while adhering to social distancing rules.

The Premier League is suspended indefinitely because of the pandemic, but there remains a chance play will resume this season.

"Well, the first two weeks was a little bit weird because I don't know what's going on," De Bruyne said.

"Then I managed to get a treadmill. I was swimming a little bit because I'm lucky to have a pool downstairs.

"I was doing a couple of lengths but now mostly I'm doing a run and I would say every other day I would choose between swimming and doing some exercise, so I'm keeping fairly good for what we can on our own, I guess."

Asked if City are sending through information and drills, he said: "They send us like a fairly big program. "I think at the beginning of lockdown some of the gym physios went to the club and made videos of what we can do, different types of exercises."

Highly Unlikely U.S. Open Would Be Held Without Fans

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The organizers of the U.S. Open said a decision on whether to hold the Grand Slam this year amid the coronavirus outbreak will be made in June, and playing it without fans is on the table but highly unlikely.

The U.S. Open, which is scheduled to run from Aug. 31 to Sept. 13, is both the largest and loudest of the four Grand Slam events on the tennis calendar and United States Tennis Association (USTA) chief executive Mike Dowse does not anticipate that changing.

"Playing without spectators, we're not taking anything off the table right now, but to be honest and open, I think that's highly unlikely," Dowse said on a conference call.

"That's not really in the spirit of the celebration of tennis. It also goes back to the health and wellbeing of not just the spectators but of our players and support staff that help run the tournament."

The U.S. Open is held annually in New York City, which is the hardest hit U.S. city in the coronavirus pandemic and this week revised its official COVID-19 death toll sharply higher to more than 10,000.

The USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, which is the home of the U.S. Open, has even been turned into temporary hospital to help in the battle against the coronavirus.

Last year's U.S. Open drew an all-time attendance record of nearly 740,000 fans and the event is the engine that drives the USTA, which is governing body for the sport in the country.



Djokovic Shares
Olympic Regrets
With Murray

LONDON (Reuters) - Live tennis action is a fading memory during the coronavirus shutdown but 20,000 fans tuned in to watch old rivals Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray chew the fat on Instagram on Friday.

Sitting on their sofas at home, the duo spent an entertaining hour reminiscing about some of the classics in their 36-match series, painful losses and even came up with the perfect tennis player.

The knockabout banter offered some candid reflections on their glittering careers — both on hold as tennis awaits the end of the pandemic which has claimed more than 150,000 lives globally.

Asked which losses hurt the most, both selected matches against each other.

"For me it was the French Open final against you in 2016," Murray, who has also finished runner-up at the Australian Open five times, said.

"Obviously I would have loved to win the Australian Open or the French Open but I think as a challenge for me, because clay was such a tough surface for me throughout my career, that would have been for me my biggest achievement."