

EU Has censured the United States For Refusing to Ease Sanctions on The Islamic Republic and Blocking An International Monetary Fund (IMF) Loan to Iran to Help It Fight The COVID-19 Pandemic

IRAN NEWS

Georgia Has Handed Over 101 Iranian Prisoners Who Were Serving Their Time in the Country Over to Iran as Part of a Repatriation Effort Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

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2

DOMESTIC

All Efforts Underway To Surge Production



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Non-Oil Exports From Iranian Ports Increase by 4%



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

UN Warns Strongly Against Israeli Plans To Annex W Bank

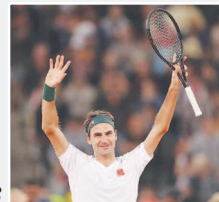


> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Federer Calls for ATP/WTB Merger



> SEE PAGE 8

Tehran Promises a Crushing Response to U.S. Forces If Ships Attacked

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The leader of Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has promised a "crushing response" to any American military attacks in the Gulf after United States President Donald Trump threatened to "shoot down and destroy" Iranian vessels.

Iran officials on Thursday also accused Trump of "bullying" and said he should focus on caring for US service members infected with the coronavirus instead of making threats. Thousands of US service members have contracted the virus, including hundreds on a stricken aircraft carrier, docked in Guam, and at least two have died from COVID-19.

"I have ordered our naval forces to destroy any American terrorist force in the Persian Gulf that threatens security of Iran's military or non-military ships," General Hossein Salami told national TV. "Security of the Persian Gulf is part of Iran's strategic priorities."

The U.S. president's tweet on Wednesday saying he had authorised the US Navy in the region to attack any Iranian fast boats that engaged American military assets came after an encounter last week between the two forces in the Gulf.

See Page 7

93 More Succumb To COVID-19 in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Public Relations and Information Center of the Ministry of Health announced that so far, 88,194 people in the country have definitely been infected with the Coronavirus, 5,574 people have died due to the virus and 66,596 or 75% of total infected people have recovered.

Kianoush Jahanpour on Friday about the latest data on the deadly coronavirus in the country and the deaths caused by the virus said, "According to the definitive laboratory findings and from yesterday to April 24 in the country, 1,168 new patients with COVID-19 were diagnosed in the country and the number of patients with this disease reached 88,194."

Fortunately, 66,596 patients have recovered and have been discharged so far, Jahanpour added.

The head of the Ministry of Public Relations Center said, "Unfortunately, in the past 24 hours, 93 COVID-19 patients have lost their lives, and 5,574 people have lost their lives in the country to date."

See Page 7

IRGC Vows More Surprises to Come Soon



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Division has said that the country is receiving signals from its recently launched Noor satellite and that it plans to launch a future satellite in higher orbit.

Speaking on Thursday, Brigadier General Amir-Ali Hajizadeh said that Iran had received the satellite's signals from stations near the capital Tehran and the southeastern cities of Zahedan and Chabahar following its launch. "We received the latest signal last night," he added, explaining that the satellite orbits the earth every 90 minutes. "The satellite's configurations will be fully set in a few days allowing the satellite to attain its full operational capacity," he added.

Iran's first military satellite, dubbed Noor-1 (Light 1), was launched into orbit some 425 kilometers above the Earth's surface on Wednesday.

Iran's IRGC has, for the first time, launched and successfully placed into orbit a military satellite.

Also in his remarks, Hajizadeh stressed the importance of space technologies in addressing Iran's civilian and military needs. He added that the development of the satellite was a "super project" made possible by undertaking major leaps in the technology field.

The general added that the IRGC seeks to launch a future satellite "in a higher orbit and with better performance" in the "near future".

Explaining that Noor's satellite carrier - dubbed Qased (Messenger) - used a missile engine from Iran's existing missile arsenal operating on liquid fuel, the general said that future motors will be upgraded to work with solid fuel. Solid fuel will allow for the production of smaller satellite carriers, he said.

Hajizadeh added that the Qased's structure had also been made of composite material, a "complex" and "state-of-the-art" feature decreasing the weight of the missile.

The general also noted that the Noor satellite's communication and telecommunication systems had been fully designed and manufactured inside the country.

Also in his remarks, Hajizadeh said that the satellite launch had "caught western intelligence agencies by surprise".

"It is natural for them to be frustrated by what we've done," he added, stressing that the force will continue with its space operations "with force" to protect the country.

Hajizadeh added that Iran's military capabilities have allowed the country to focus on countering U.S. economic sanctions imposed on the country without facing security disturbances.

He also noted how Iran's capabilities had successfully deterred Washington from further provocations after Iran responded to Washington's assassination of its top commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in January.

See Page 7

Venezuela Receives Material to Help Restart Refinery From Iran

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela has received refining materials via plane shipment from Iran to help it start the catalytic cracking unit at the 310,000 barrel-per-day Cardon refinery, which is necessary to produce gasoline, an official said on Thursday.

Erling Rojas, vice minister for refining and petrochemicals in the OPEC nation's oil ministry, announced the arrival of the material on Twitter and said, "Thanks to the support of our allies in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

According to reports, on Thursday, the second flight by Iranian airline Mahan Air arrived at a town in western Venezuela delivering key chemical components used for producing gasoline, two oil industry people familiar with the operation told The Associated Press. They insisted on speaking anonymously to discuss the rescue plan because they were not authorized to talk about it. One said 14 more flights are expected in the coming days, some of them carrying Iranian technicians. The website FlightRadar24, which tracks international flights, showed the plane's routes.

Drivers in recent weeks have started lining up at gas stations for days even in the capital of Caracas, the nation's political center that has long been immune to long waits, even as strict coronavirus quarantines have limited movement.

Iranian flights to Venezuela are rare, and those landing Wednesday and Thursday at an airport in the state of Falcon took place amid a strictly enforced flight ban by Maduro due to the pandemic. The airport is near the Paraguaná Refinery Complex, one of the largest in the world.

Both antagonistic to the U.S., the governments of Venezuela and Iran have each been hit by U.S. sanctions.

The Trump administration has recently led a "maximum pressure" campaign aimed at ousting Maduro, considering opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the nation's legitimate leader. The U.S. and a coalition of nearly 60 nations say Maduro clings to power following a 2018 election that critics consider a sham because the most popular opposition politicians were banned from running. Venezuela's Ministry of Communications didn't immediately respond to an emailed request from AP seeking comment.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Noor-1 Satellite Stupefies the World

On Wednesday morning, April 22, and with Almighty God blessings, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a muscle-showing act, shot successfully its first military satellite, dubbed "Noor-1" (light-1), into the orbit by its brave and glory maker IRGC forces to monitor the country's space.

The satellite was launched with a three-phased Qased carrier by IRGC's Aerospace Division and it was put into orbit at an altitude of 425 kilometers from the earth's surface in the desert plain's Shahroud region. Such a bold move is a major achievement and a big development in the aerospace field for Islamic Iran because in the current condition that the Islamic Republic of Iran is under the hardest political, economic, technology sanctions and its enemies do not let it even buy and import its industrial needs and any of its move is monitored by enemies' traitor elements inside the country, such a condition for a country to take such a brave and unbelievable action is not so simple.

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) General Hossein Salami in an interview after the success said that the successful launch of the satellite improved the new dimensions of the defense power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adding that today Iran has become a power in aerospace and such a success indicates that the country can achieve significant and global success in any field that it steps in.

He noted that the world's powerful armies would be lacking in a comprehensive defense plan without reaching the space, adding that it was necessary for a strong defense force such as the IRGC to acquire the space technologies. "Achieving this raising technology which takes us to space and expands the domain of our capabilities is a strategic achievement," the commander stressed.

In the simplest analysis of this achievement, one can point out that IRGC today with this achievement has been equipped with a tool that helps it to improve its dominance and access to geopolitical, economic and military information.

Of course this point should be taken into consideration that so far no comprehensive details about capabilities of Noor-1 Satellite have been revealed but one can easily realize that Noor-1 is a multi-purpose satellite which is used in compliance with the objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and it has both civil and military usages.

See Page 7

Russia Dismisses U.S. Claims on IRGC Satellite Launch

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has dismissed as "baseless" claims by the United States that the recent launch of Iran's first-ever military satellite by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) violates a United Nations Security Council resolution endorsing the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers.

On Wednesday, the IRGC Aerospace Force launched the Noor (Light) satellite via the Qased (Carrier) carrier, a move US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was quick to condemn as a violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231.

"This would not be the first time that a nation that has flagrantly breached the norms of international law and violated UNSC resolution 2231 is trying to deflect international condemnation by baselessly accusing Iran of noncompliance with the requirements of the Security Council," Russia's Sputnik news agency quoted Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova as saying at a briefing on Thursday.

She noted that neither the resolution nor the 2015 Iran nuclear deal restrict Iran's right to explore space to peaceful ends.

See Page 7



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IRGC to Further Disappoint, Frustrate Enemies

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Chairman of Assembly of Experts Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati congratulated the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps [IRGC] on the successful launch of “Noor-1” satellite and emphasized that enemies of the Islamic Revolution should know that Iran’s armed forces will further disappoint you [enemies] more than ever.

The latest achievement of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has been reflected in international media outlets and received widespread media coverage, he said in his message.

All Efforts Underway To Surge Production

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani said that all the efforts of the government are for materializing the motto of the year as dubbed ‘Surge in Production’ by Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

President Rouhani made the remarks in the video conference to inaugurate important projects in Fars Province, southern Iran.

Expressing confidence that the whole private, public, and military sections are trying hard for the same purpose, Rouhani hoped that several projects would be opened this year.

The Iranian president said that in addition to fight with coronavirus, the country will continue to produce goods and provide employment for people.

President Rouhani further said that with opening South Aluminum Corporation in Lamerd, the ranking of Iran’s aluminum productions will change from 18 to 14.

He added Iran ranks 10th and 15th in terms of production of steel and copper, respectively which is very important.

The Iranian president said that the people are not well-informed of all the results of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

He added that the JCPOA created developments in oil, gas, mining, and other industries, including aluminum.

The first phase of South Aluminum Complex, Haj-Heydar 124-bed hospital, Shahid Qasem Soleimani Sports Complex, and the new terminal of Lamerd Airport were inaugurated by President Rouhani earlier on Wednesday.

The projects were to be inaugurated in late winter, but due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, it was postponed.



Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Reza Rahmani, Minister of Sport and Youth Masoud Solatanifar, and some other high-ranking officials were present during the opening ceremonies on behalf of President Rouhani.

The first phase of the South Aluminum Complex can produce up to 120 tons of ingots a day, which is going to be increased to 300,000 tons a year. Defense, aviation, car-making, construction, packaging, and cable industries will use its products. The factory was made with 186,000 billion rials (\$1.2 billion).

The new terminal of Lamerd Airport has two flight halls for domestic and international flights, and two transit halls for domestics and international flights. 400 billion rials were invested in making the terminal.

Haj-Heydar Hospital was made with 1,200 billion rials and in 7 years. It has operations theater, laboratory, radiology, dialysis, physiotherapy, laundry, administrative, pharmacy, men, women, and emergency wards.

Shahid Qasem Soleimani sports complex was completed in 24 months. And it has Futsal, handball, hockey, volleyball, and basketball multifunctional courts, swimming pools, sauna, Jacuzzi and swimming pool for children.

Iran-Turkey Trade Exchanges Must Continue

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani in a phone call with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan late on Wednesday stressed the need for strengthening mutual, regional and international cooperation, saying that efforts should be made to ensure that trade between the two countries continues in full compliance with health protocols.

Congratulating arrival of the holy month of Ramadhan to the Turkish Muslim people and government, Rouhani said that Ramadhan is the month of blessing, mercy and forgiveness, hoping that the month would be a source of blessing for the two Muslim nations of Iran and Turkey as well as other Muslims around the world.

Coronavirus outbreak has created numerous difficulties for the governments and nations around the world, he said, noting that Iran and Turkey have proved that they have been alongside each other in hard times.

Rouhani also hailed Iran’s valuable successes in the field of fighting coronavirus, stressing the need for interaction among the officials and exchange of experiences between the two countries.

Referring to U.S. cruel sanctions and severe pressures on Iran and creating obstacle in the way of IMF loan payment to the country under the difficult situation, he called on all the countries to adopt a clear and decisive stance against the US anti-human pressures.

Rouhani also described Iran-Turkey-Russia talks to implement agreements within the framework of Astana Process, saying that all should try to restore stability to Syria and regional nations.

President Erdogan, for his part, congratulated the Iranian people and government on the arrival of holy month of Ramadhan, hoping that God would make Ramadhan a means of health and happiness, peace and tranquility among nations.

Describing Iranian government and nation’s fight against coronavirus outbreak despite all problems as very valuable, he said, “We must work to ensure that trade between the two countries continues in accordance with the principles of health, and officials in both countries must work together in this respect.”

Erdoghan further noted that his country has always opposed to US cruel sanctions against Iran, adding that Iran and Turkey as the two friendly and brotherly countries will put behind these hard times as well.

He also called for efforts in line with establishing sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Concerted Global Effort Needed to Fight Coronavirus

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat says the United States’ “illegal and inhumane” sanctions against the Islamic Republic double the pressure on the people of Iran amid their struggle to cope with the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

Abbas Araqchi, Iran’s deputy foreign minister for political affairs, said Thursday that Washington’s sanctions have hampered the global action that is vital to curbing COVID-19, a disease caused by the new coronavirus.

“Coronavirus has spread not only in Iran but also across almost all countries in the world and [therefore] stopping it calls for a resolute effort and collective action,” he said during a phone conversation with Dutch Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Matthijs van der Plas.

“Today, in addition to fighting this virus, Iran has to deal with illegal and inhumane US sanctions as well, and this issue has doubled the pressure on the Iranian people,” Iran’s deputy foreign minister said, adding, “It is the right of the Iranian people to access their financial resources in order to counter this disease and its economic repercussions.”

The senior diplomat said the U.S. sanctions constituted

a blatant violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 endorsing the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, as a result of which all nuclear-related sanctions against the Islamic Republic were lifted.

During the conversation on Thursday, Van der Plas, for his part, sympathized with the Iranian nation and echoed Araqchi’s call for global action to stop the pandemic.

The Dutch official also expressed the Netherlands’ commitment to multilateralism and in particular to the Iran nuclear deal and its related mechanisms to ease economic pressure on Tehran.

Swiss Envoy Summoned Over U.S. Provocations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has summoned the Swiss ambassador, whose country represents the United States’ interests, to convey the Islamic Republic’s strong condemnation of the provocative and aggressive acts by the U.S. Navy’s terrorist forces in the Persian Gulf close to the Iranian coastline.

Speaking on Thursday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said, “The summoning took place because of the acts of harassment and provocation by American forces in the Persian Gulf,” IRNA reported.

The ambassador, he added, received a note to relay to American officials, in which the Islamic Republic has outlined its “strong protest” at the threats posed by the Americans, including the US fleet’s “illegal and destabilizing presence and actions” in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf’s northern waters and the Iranian coasts.

According to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Iran’s elite defense force, American vessels earlier resorted to “unprofessional and perilous” behavior in the waters, “causing trouble” for one of its logistics ship that was conducting a routine patrol. Iran says it will not capitulate to any intimidation after Trump threatens military actions against the Iranian boats protecting the country’s territorial waters.

A U.S. Navy statement has, however, alleged that 11 IRGC boats had closed in on six U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf “in dangerous and harassing approaches.” The IRGC strongly dismisses the statement, calling the account a “Hollywood tale.”

In the protest note, the Islamic Republic has “reminded the US administration of the necessity for all parties to commit to international maritime safety and free shipping regulations,” Mousavi said.

The spokesman also pointed to remarks made by Donald Trump on Wednesday in the wake of the US Navy statement, in which the American president said he had told the Navy to “shoot down and destroy” Iranian gunboats that “harass” US ships.

Iran Raps U.S., Germany’s Meddlesome Stances On IRGC Satellite Launch



TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Ministry spokesman has denounced Washington and Berlin’s recent stances on the successful launch of the Noor satellite into space, calling them interference in the Islamic Republic’s internal affairs.

In a Thursday statement, Seyyed Abbas Mousavi described the successful launch of the Noor satellite into orbit as a source of pride, saying scientific and technological advances, especially in the field of aerospace, are the Iranian nation’s right.

The spokesman said such interventions would certainly not disrupt the Iranian nation’s determination to achieve progress.

Mousavi also stressed that no UN Security Council resolution prohibits Iran from launching a satellite into space, and the U.S. reference to Resolution 2231 is definitely irrelevant and contrary to the facts.

“Interestingly, the Resolution 2231 is a resolution that the US regime has violated by withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and continues to openly pressure other independent states to violate it,” added Mousavi.

He also rejected Germany’s position on the launch of the Iranian satellite, saying the German Foreign Ministry’s expression of concern over the launch of a satellite designed by Iranian engineers comes as the German defence minister has publicized his decision to buy a fighter jet capable of carrying a nuclear bomb.

“Such double-standard policies threaten the security of the region, Europe and the world,” underlined Mousavi. At the end, the spokesman stated that the development of science and technology in the field of aerospace is Iran’s legal right, emphasising that “the Noor satellite is for peaceful purposes and has been launched in line with Iran’s defence policy.”

Distribution of Essential Food Items in Tehran

TEHRAN (Press Release) - The Embassy of Pakistan, Tehran in addition to travel facilitation and accommodation of zaireen, has conducted first phase of distribution of essential food items to those Pakistani families that are facing financial difficulties after a prolonged lockdown in Iran due to coronavirus.

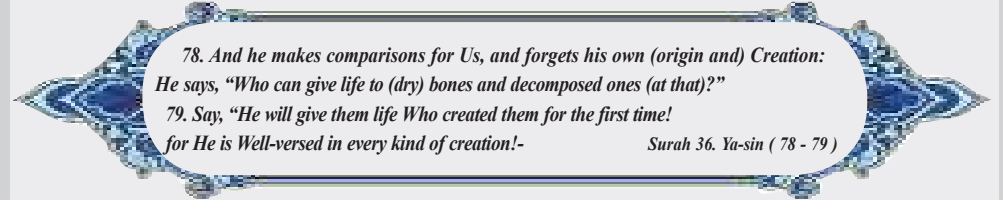
In the first phase more than seventy such families received ration packages consisting of essential food items ahead of the holy month of Ramdan.

Since the outbreak of Coronavirus in Iran, the Embassy in Tehran and its consulates in Mashhad and Zahedan have set up round the clock hotlines to provide necessary assistance and information to the Pakistani diaspora in Iran. The Embassy is in contact with all community members and student leaders and has extended all possible assistance to them while the Zaireen in Mashhad and Qom have been provided with boarding/ lodging and facilitated in repatriation to Pakistan.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:05
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:17



Non-Oil Exports From Iranian Ports Increase by 4%

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian official says the export of non-oil products from the country's ports in the last Iranian year has increased by 4% compared to a year before.

Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and the Managing Director of Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran, Mohammad Rastad, said that 52.5 million tonnes of non-oil products were exported from the ports of the country in the past Iranian year.

He added that 34 million tons of non-oil products were also imported, showing a growth of 27%.

Last year, over 150 million tons of goods were unloaded in the country's ports, which shows a 9% rise in comparison with a year earlier, he noted.

The deputy minister made the comments in a meeting with First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri and Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami on Wednesday.

"The most difficult process in the shipping chain is the entry and exit of the ship, Rastad said.

"Fortunately, in this case, in a port like Bandar-e Imam, the unloading and loading of a ship with 70,000 tons of basic goods was carried out round the clock, and by unloading 8,000 tons every 24 hours, these ships were unloaded within a maximum of eight days," he explained.

He also mentioned that some equipment that were previously manufactured and produced by the foreign companies, such as container cranes, are now built inside the country, saving about 20 million euros.



Referring to Jahangiri's visit to Shahid Rajaei Port, Rastad said the third phase of Shahid Rajaei Port is an important and strategic project that can increase the container capacity of the port from 6.3 million TEU to 8 million TEU.

"In this regard, we plan to bring at least 900 metres of the 1,400-metre pier in this project into operation and add it to the infrastructure of this port. We are also trying to bring into operation three piers for loading oil and oil products this year in Shahid Rajaei port, which can add 30 million tonnes to the country's oil production capacity."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rastad said another significant measure taken by the Ports and Maritime Organisation of Iran was to repeatedly isolate the United States and discuss its illegal actions against the Maritime Organisation's conventions.

He also referred to the infrastructural works carried out on the country's coasts, saying that among these moves, the integrated management of the country's coasts is a strategic plan.

In the end, Rastad said the issue of multifaceted transportation, which is strongly emphasised by the minister, is one of the issues that is being seriously pursued by the Ports and Maritime Organisation.

"That is why we have increased the share of railways in ports in an unprecedented move, and this programme will definitely continue," he concluded.

Unemployment Rate Drops

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's unemployment rate has dropped from 12 percent to 10.2 percent in the last Iranian year (from March 20, 2019 through March 20, 2020), said First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri.

"The government has been creating 600,000 jobs every year since it came to power and it has created 430,000 job opportunities in the last fiscal year, so the number of unemployed has reduced from 3.2 million to 2.8 million people last year," said Jahangiri.

"A total of \$1.6 billion worth of loans has been prepared to be offered to the low-income village population at 4.6 10 percent interest rates, in the current Iranian year to create jobs," he added.

"The villagers can be active in eco-tourism, although during the coronavirus they have been facing damages, but they will be provide with support," he said.

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 is one of the countries heavily affected by the rapidly-spreading coronavirus.

Iran, Nakhichevan Energy Cooperation Reviewed

BAKU (IRNA) - Iran's Consul General in Nakhichevan Seyed Ahmad Hosseini and Head of Nakhchivan Oil and Gas Supply Institute Behrouz Azimov on Wednesday discussed cooperation between the country and the autonomous republic in the energy sector.

During the meeting, Azimov referred to the recent fluctuations in the energy market and described as an important event in the field of energy trade, which will have a tremendous impact on the economic activities of various countries and will challenge the economies of energy-rich communities.

Iran's consul-general, for his part, pointed to the significance of the energy sector in regional countries' cooperation and highlighted his country's capacities in the field to meet needs of the neighbors.

Hosseini hoped that areas of collaboration would be further discussed in the post-corona era.

Production Line of Bioethanol Through Fermentation Launched

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The production line of bioethanol through fermentation was launched in the presence of Iran's minister of science and higher education Mansour Gholami on Thursday.

The production line started work in line with anti-coronavirus national committee's enactments, current sensitive situation, lack of disinfectants in the market and the importance of all executive bodies' participation.

The 90% bioethanol is suitable for procuring disinfectants and is based on the formulation suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Iranian chemists and researchers were able to launch the production line of bioethanol in less than 14 days.

Making bioethanol through fermentation process takes 8-14 days and Iran was able to produce it for the first time in less than 24 hours.

Iran has taken numerous steps to stop the spread of the disease, from shutting down schools and universities to canceling cultural and religious gatherings. It is also constantly disinfecting and sanitizing public places.

3rd Maritime Transportation Line Between Iran and Oman To Be Launched



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The third maritime transportation line between Iran's Jask Port and Oman's ports will be launched in days.

Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization Hamid Zadboum says that to expand trade level between Iran and Oman in line with both countries' agreement, the third maritime transportation line between Jask Port and some Omani ports will be inaugurated in upcoming days.

He pointed to the volume of trade between Iran and Oman and called for deepening and expanding bilateral trade with Oman.

Zadboum added that in early days of April, two container shipping lines between Bandar Abbas port of Iran and Sultan Qaboos and Al-Sawiq ports of Oman were inaugurated, adding that major traded goods by those lines are foodstuff, agro cultures and fruits.

He noted that launching direct transportation lines between Iran and Oman is according to the agreement signed between both countries during their last meeting of joint economic commission in order to shorten the time for transporting the cargoes between both states.

Zadboum further said that the new maritime transportation line between Jask Port to Omani ports can facilitate the transportation of agro products, food stuff, construction materials and other consumer goods.

Iran and Oman had signed a maritime cooperation agreement in December 2019 for boosting maritime transportation between the two countries.

Based on the agreement, Iranian traders and businessmen would be able to interact constructively with their Omani counterparts, and regular shipping lines were to be established between the two countries, while the two sides also pledged to provide facilities for using each other's ports.

Iran and Oman have already launched four direct shipping lines between the two countries' ports.

CBI Governor Urges IMF to Remain Neutral

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Governor of the Central Bank of Iran has called on the International Monetary Fund to maintain its neutrality and review Tehran's request for an emergency loan at its Board of Directors.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the countries that has suffered the brunt (of the coronavirus) in the MENA region," CBI Chief Abolnaser Hemmati said at a video conference meeting between the finance ministers and directors generals of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva.

Hemmati also expressed his gratitude to the IMF for offering financial aid to the countries plagued by COVID-19.

"Also, Iran was one of the first countries to request emergency support funds under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI)," the CBI chief noted.

"We worked with the IMF staff to assess the amount needed in the balance of payments due to this global pandemic," he added.

The top official then expressed hope that the IMF would remain a neutral international entity.

"From our perspective, the IMF is an independent and non-political international institution and we hope it will remain the same," he said.

"Our people expect the IMF as well as the World Bank to be answerable, which makes it all the more necessary for the IMF to respond impartially, seriously and immediately" Hemmati stressed.

"If the neutrality of the IMF is harmed, it will be very difficult to fix it," the CBI chief warned.

Hemmati then asked the IMF managing director to have Iran's RFI request brought up at the Board of Directors to be decided on.

Iran is going to use the financial aid from the RFI to procure the medical equipment needed to save the lives of coronavirus patients and stem the spread of the disease, Hemmati concluded.

No Trade Between Iran and Pakistan Due to Border Restrictions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A member of board of directors of Pakistan-Iran Joint Chamber of Commerce says continuation of current restrictions in Pakistan's border crossings will create serious problems for trade between Iran and Pakistan.

Speaking to ILNA, Mahmoud Tohidast pointed to the current condition of trade between both countries, adding that there is no trade between both states. He further said the outbreak of Coronavirus has created abundant problems in borders between two countries and for now, there is no official trade between Iran and Pakistan.

He also said due to the beginning of the holy month of Ramadhan, the trade between both countries would almost come to a halt.

Tohidast reiterated that the Coronavirus broke out in Pakistan sooner than Iran and if Pakistan continues border



restrictions, the trade between Iran and Pakistan will face serious problems, adding that it is necessary that all officials of both countries continue talks to resolve problems by presenting solutions through observing all health protocols in order to resume activities and trade.

He admitted the outbreak of virus has affected transportation activists and truck drivers more than any other jobs.

Tohidast went on to say that one may see some trade activities in the borders but they are not official and they are mostly smuggling of goods.

He said Iran has reopened business and it may open its borders too, but Pakistan still insists on keeping their borders closed.

He admitted that even after the opening of borders, most drivers may refrain from resuming activities to stay away from being infected by the virus.

Tehran, Moscow Discuss Ways to Fight Coronavirus

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The representatives of Iran's and Russia's health ministries discussed the latest information and exchanged views about the measures taken by the two countries in order to counter the coronavirus outbreak.

In a video conference on Thursday, the head of international cooperation of Iran's Ministry of Health Mohsen Assadi-Lari and Russia's deputy Health Minister Alexandra Dronova exchanged most recent information about the measures taken by the two countries in fight against the potentially deadly virus, as well as the scientific achievements in that area.

Assadi-Lari elaborated on Iran's measures as restricting traffic inside and outside



cities, shutting down public places, preparing different health protocols, reinforcing informatics infrastructures, especially launching online education systems, launching diagnostic laboratories, national mobilization against coronavirus, social distancing, designing self-declaration applications, making six new medicines, and five new treatment methods, including plasma and stem cell therapy.

Dronova said that Russia is in the hardest condition and the number of COVID-19 infected cases are increasing.

The Russian official added that among the achievements of Iran are making different kinds of diagnostic kits and social distancing and equipping laboratories.

New Zealand Ruling Party to Retain Parliamentary Majority in Election

WELLINGTON (Reuters) - New Zealand's ruling Labour party coalition is likely to retain parliamentary majority following the Sept. 19 general election due to its adept handling of the COVID-19 outbreak, a unit of Fitch Group said on Friday.

"Our view is informed by the New Zealand government's adept handling of the COVID-19 outbreak in its country, which we believe will allow them to enjoy greater support, as well as Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's strong personal appeal," Fitch Solutions Country Risk and Industry Research, a unit of Fitch Group, said in its outlook.



German Court Tries IS Jihadist Over Yazidi Genocide

BERLIN (Dispatches) - A man believed to have belonged to the Islamic State (IS) group went on trial in Germany on Friday accused of genocide and murdering a child belonging to the Yazidi minority who he held as a slave.

Identified only as Taha al-J., the 37-year-old Iraqi man is also accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes and human trafficking in the case, heard before Frankfurt judges.

His wife, a German woman named Jennifer Wenisch, has been on trial for a year at a Munich court.



UN Warns Strongly Against Israeli Plans to Annex W Bank



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Israel's plan to annex large swaths the West Bank from the Palestinians would mark a "devastating blow" to the long-sought two-state solution, the UN's coordinator for Israeli-Palestinian peace warned Thursday.

"The dangerous prospect of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied West Bank is a growing threat," Nickolay Mladenov told the body's Security Council. "If such a move were implemented, it would constitute a serious violation of international law, deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and opposition leader Benn Gantz formed an emergency unity government Monday to prevent a fourth round of national elections in just over a year.

In so doing, Gantz and Netanyahu pledged to move ahead with the West Bank's annexation beginning July 1, with plans to seize the Jordan Valley and Israeli settlements built in the Palestinian territory that are illegal under international law.

Palestinian officials have threatened to cancel bilateral agreements with Israel should it move forward with annexation.

"We won't sit with our hands crossed and do nothing if Israel declares annexation, and if that happens, we will consider the agreements forged between the Palestinians, Israel and the United States to be null and void," Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas warned, according to Israeli news outlet Haaretz.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a staunch backer of the Israeli government, lent his implicit support to the plan, telling reporters Wednesday "as for the annexation in the West Bank, the Israelis will ultimately make those decisions."

"That's an Israeli decision, and we will work closely with them to share with them our views of this in a private setting," he said.

Mladenov said if Israel moves forward with annexation it "will only lead to more conflict and suffering."

"However, there is a different path— one of working together to modernize and expand existing agreements, of solidifying the current relative calm in Gaza," he said.

U.S. May Never Restore WHO Funds After Cutoff Over Pandemic

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the COVID-19 pandemic shows the need to overhaul the World Health Organization, warning that Washington may never restore WHO funding and could even work to set up an alternative to the U.N. body instead.

As Pompeo launched fresh attacks on the WHO, Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives accused the Trump administration of trying to "scapegoat" the institution to distract from its own handling of the coronavirus outbreak.

In a letter to President Donald Trump, they called for the immediate restoration of U.S. funding, which Trump suspended last week after accusing the WHO of being "China-centric" and of promoting China's "disinformation" about the outbreak.

Pompeo told Fox News late on Wednesday there needed to be "a structural fix of the WHO" to correct its "shortcomings."

Asked if he was urging a change in leadership of the WHO, Pompeo replied: "Even more than that, it may be the case that the United States can never return to underwriting, having U.S. taxpayer dollars go to the WHO."

In a radio show interview on Thursday, Pompeo was asked if he saw a time when the role of the WHO might be supplanted by another organization. "We're going to take a look at exactly that issue," he replied.

"If the institution works and functions, the United States will always lead and be part of it. When it's not delivering, when in fact it's failing to get the outcomes that are desired, we're going to work with partners around the world to deliver a structure, a form, a governance model, that will actually deliver on the intended purposes."

The WHO has denied the Trump administration's charges and China insists it has been transparent and open.

The United States has been the biggest overall donor to the WHO, contributing over \$400 million in 2019, roughly 15% of its budget. Senior U.S. officials last week told Reuters Washington could redirect these funds to other aid groups.

On Wednesday, Pompeo said the United States "strongly believed" Beijing had failed to report the outbreak in a timely manner, in breach of WHO rules. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus did not use his ability "to go public" when a member state failed to follow those rules, Pompeo added.

Libya Turning Into Experimental Field for Arms

TUNIS (Reuters) - Libya is turning into "an experimental field for all kinds of new weapons systems", the United Nations' acting special envoy said, with foreign supporters of its warring parties shipping in arms and fighters in violation of an embargo.

Libya's conflict escalated sharply this month, with fierce fighting on several different fronts in the west of the country despite urgent calls from the U.N. and aid agencies for a truce to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

The new wave of fighting has been fuelled by arms imported from abroad, the U.N. acting envoy Stephanie Williams said in an online news conference.

"We have something called the RPO-A flame thrower, which is some kind of thermobaric system that is being used in the southern suburbs of Tripoli. We have new UAVs (drones) that are being brought in, including a UAV that is essentially like a suicide UAV that explodes on impact," Williams said.

"These are just two examples of very frightening systems that are being deployed in an urban setting which is completely unacceptable," she added.

Concerns that the conflict may have taken a dark new turn emerged late on Wednesday when the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) said it was investigating a possible chemical weapons attack on its forces.

The Libyan National Army (LNA) of eastern-based Khalifa Haftar has been shelling the capital Tripoli, the seat of the GNA, since launching a military campaign to capture the city a year ago.

Pro-GNA forces have in recent weeks mounted their own offensives to drive back the LNA, capturing some towns in the northwest last week and moving towards Haftar's main strategic centre in the region, the town of Tarhouna.

The LNA is backed by the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Egypt, the GNA by Turkey, whose military support from January onwards has helped change the balance of power on the ground.

Bosnian Security Minister Wants Thousands of Migrants Deported

SARAJEVO (Dispatches) - Migrants should be deported from Bosnia, the country's security minister proposed on Thursday, alleging they pose a potential security threat and a severe economic burden amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Fahrudin Radoncic also said migrants who could not provide passports or other identification documents should be imprisoned rather than accommodated in migrant camps in Bosnia.

"[Migrants] who do not want to show their identity cards will not be allowed any more to use our migrant and refugee camps," he said. "They will go straight to jail. And we will keep them there for one year to five years until we can establish their identity - this is our proposal for a new law."

He provided no date for when the proposed legislation would be debated in parliament, but the country's Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA) has already begun preparing a list of those slated for deportation, Slobodan Ujic, the director of the SFA, told local news website Balkan Insight on Thursday.

Most migrants come from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Algeria and Morocco, the website reported.

Radoncic's comments reflect growing frustration in the small Balkan country with the influx of those who are fleeing violence and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Asia and who hope to move on towards Western Europe.

Most end up trapped in Bosnia, as Croatia, the next country on the migration route, has imposed strict border controls.

"We want to [ease] the burden of taking care of 8,000 to 9,000 people here, we just can't handle that, especially now, with the virus situation," Radoncic said. "We also want to psychologically discourage new migrants from coming here after the pandemic ends and borders open again."

He said Bosnia had become "a parking lot" for migrants on their way to Western Europe, according to local media, which also reported he had asked migrants' countries of origin for funds to pay for their deportation airfare.

Ujic told Balkan Insight that he doubted many would volunteer for repatriation: "These people have travelled thousands of kilometres, for months, and are now at the door of the European Union. They don't want to return."



Poll Signals Strengthening Support for Biden Over Trump

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Republican President Donald Trump trails Democrat Joe Biden among registered voters in three battleground states that he narrowly carried in 2016 and are seen as crucial to winning November's election, according to an Ipsos public opinion poll conducted exclusively for Reuters.

The poll, which ran from April 15-20 in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, showed 45% of registered voters said they would support Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee, while 39% said they would support Trump.

It also found that Biden, vice president under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama, has an advantage of 3 percentage points among registered voters in Wisconsin, 6 points in Pennsylvania and 8 points in Michigan.

The Ipsos poll shows Biden has maintained or slightly improved his lead over Trump in those states over the past few months, even though his campaign and the presidential primaries have been sidelined by the coronavirus pandemic. The United States has the most confirmed cases and deaths in the world with at least 821,000 people infected and at least 46,000 deaths.

Biden's advantage in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania over Trump averaged 3 to 4 percentage points in February and March, according to an aggregation of survey results by Real Clear Politics.

That would also suggest that Trump has not experienced an uptick in support in those states, even though he has commanded the public's attention at the helm of the federal response to the coronavirus crisis and sought to cast himself as a "wartime president" fighting an invisible enemy.

A separate Reuters/Ipsos poll found on Tuesday that Biden has an 8-point advantage over Trump nationally, as support for him rose nationally in each of the last three weeks while disapproval of Trump's response to the pandemic grew.

To be sure, anything can happen with several months to go before the Nov. 3 general election. State polls in 2016 showed Democrat Hillary Clinton enjoyed wide leads over Trump early in the election cycle in those same states before she lost them to Trump on Election Day, all of them by less than a percentage point.

Trump is still a little more popular in those battlegrounds than he is nationally, in part thanks to his appeal to some blue-collar white voters.





Mahmodieh (\$3500)
400sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, S, J
L.balcony
Nice view
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Parsian

Shariati Villa (\$3500)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p, S
J, balcony
pkg, & yard

((\$1800))
Darrous Apt
160sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, & F.F

Shahrak-e-Gharb
170sq.m, 3bdrs
(\$1400)
F.F

((\$8000))
Fereshteh bldg
4storey, 12bdrs
yard, & pkg lots

Vanak (\$1300)
130sq.m, 2bdrs
balcony, & Nicely Furn

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Renault's First-Quarter Sales Fall, Outlook Still Unclear

PARIS (Reuters) - French carmaker Renault on Thursday posted a 19.2% drop in first-quarter revenue to 10.13 billion euros (\$10.97 billion), and said it was still too early to assess what impact the coronavirus crisis would have on its earnings this year.

The group, which had already cancelled its dividend and suspended its financial outlook, has

been hit hard by the health crisis as demand for cars plummets, while many dealerships and production sites have closed.

Renault sold more cars in Russia than in its home market in the January-March period as demand plummeted in Europe, the first time ever France has slid from the top spot.



China on Slow Road to Recovery, But Recession Risk Is High

BENGALURU (Reuters) - The Chinese economy will slowly recover from its first quarterly contraction since current records began, economists predicted in a Reuters poll, but they warned of a likely recession if conditions worsen again from the global coronavirus pandemic.

The poll found China's gross domestic product (GDP) was expected to grow just 1.3% in the current quarter on a year earlier, after contracting 6.8% in January-March.

Reflecting the heightened uncertainty, forecasts for second quarter GDP growth ranged from -5.0% to +5.0%, with economists based in mainland China providing all of the more optimistic predictions. The poll of more than 40 economists in mainland China and beyond was taken April 20-22. At a time when countries around the world are considering how to ease their lockdowns of businesses and households, China earlier this month lifted its lockdown of Wuhan, where the outbreak began, and announced it would fully restore rail, flight and freight operations by the end of April.

The Chinese authorities have also allowed factories to resume production and reopen businesses, leading to a recovery in manufacturing activity in March for the first time this year in the world's second-largest economy.

But while China's economy is starting up again much earlier than major economies in Europe and the United States, which are still struggling with high reported infections and deaths from COVID-19, the outlook has deteriorated significantly with successive downgrades. "Although there is resumption of work, that doesn't mean that the economy is going back to the pre-COVID-19 levels, it is way, way behind that," said Iris Pang, Greater China economist at ING in Hong Kong.

"As long as strict social distancing measures are in place, we think China will struggle to recover quickly. I also worry there will be a second round of infection from the western part of the world because they are now relaxing the lockdown before their cases subside. That's why I forecast a recession."

The contraction just recently reported for Q1 was only a few tenths of a percentage point lower than the median 6.5% shrinkage forecast in a Reuters poll published on April 14.

Under a worst-case scenario, Q2 GDP is forecast to contract 1.0%, according to the median view, which would mean two consecutive quarters of contraction, the textbook definition of a recession used by most economists. In 2020 as a whole, China's economy is forecast to grow 1.8%, the weakest annual performance since 1976, the final year of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, and less than one-third the 6.1% rate clocked in 2019.

That is a sharp downgrade from a poll published last week, where 2020 growth was forecast at 2.5%. In early March, economists were expecting 5.4%, showing just how rapidly the outlook has wilted. "Overall, GDP probably will contract this year, though the authorities likely will print a positive number. We are unlikely ever to go back to the days of wrangling over '6.1%' or '6.2%'," said Freya Beamish, London-based chief Asia economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, who along with seven other respondents predicts a recession.

"The recovery in consumption looks a lot less secure, given efforts to stem a second virus wave and the massive salary and job cuts in Q1. Firms are not willing to produce and flood inventory in Q2 while the demand in the rest of the world collapses."

Under a worst-case scenario, the economy will grow only 0.8% according to the median forecast from responses to an additional question.

But economists still generally expect China's economy to pick up strongly later this year, growing 5.3% in the third quarter and 6.0% in the final quarter of this year, only a touch slower than predicted a few weeks ago.

Fitch Ratings Sees India Growth Slipping to 0.8% in FY21

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The agency further said that the current recession will be twice as severe as the 2009 recession.

Fitch Ratings on Thursday slashed India's economic growth projections to 0.8 per cent in the current 2020-21 fiscal saying an unparalleled global recession was underway due to disruptions caused by the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic and resultant lockdowns.

In its Global Economic Outlook, Fitch Ratings said India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth will slip to 0.8 per cent for the year April 2020 to March 2021 (FY21) as compared to an estimated 4.9 per cent growth in the previous fiscal.

Growth is, however, expected to rebound to 6.7 per cent in 2021-22.

The rating agency predicted two consecutive quarters of contraction or negative year-on-year growth in current fiscal -- (-)0.2 per cent in April-June and (-)0.1 per cent in July-September. This compares to 4.4 per cent estimated growth in January-March. Growth is expected to rebound to 1.4 per cent in the last quarter of 2020 calendar year.

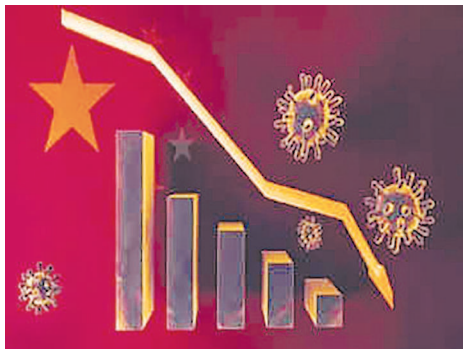
Fitch said the slump in FY21 growth was mainly due to a projected fall in consumer spending to just 0.3 per cent in FY21 from 5.5 per cent a year back and a 3.5 per cent contraction in fixed investment. The agency has further made large cuts to global GDP forecasts in its latest Global Economic Outlook (GEO) in response to coronavirus-related lockdown extensions and incoming data flows.

"World GDP is now expected to fall by 3.9 per cent in 2020, a recession of unprecedented depth in the post-war period," said Brian Coulton, Chief Economist at Fitch Ratings.

This would be twice as severe as the 2009 recession.

The decline in GDP equates to a USD 2.8 trillion fall in global income levels relative to 2019 and a loss of USD 4.5 trillion relative to pre-virus expectations of 2020 global GDP.

"No country or region has been spared from the devastating economic impact of the global pandemic," the rating agency said.



South Korea Posts Biggest GDP Fall Since 2008

SEOUL (Reuters) - The coronavirus pandemic pushed South Korea's economy into its biggest contraction since 2008 in the first quarter, as self-isolation measures hit consumption and global trade slumped.

Finance minister Hong Nam-ki said in a policy meeting Asia's fourth-largest economy should brace for a bigger shock from the second quarter as demand from major trading partners plummets.

South Korea's virus containment measures are being closely watched by governments elsewhere as it has managed to bring down infections without the kinds of heavy shutdowns seen in other jurisdictions.

However, the pandemic's hit to global trade has left the export-reliant economy under extreme pressure.

Gross domestic product decreased by a seasonally adjusted 1.4% in the first quarter from three months earlier, preliminary central bank data showed on Thursday, a slightly smaller decline than the 1.5% contraction seen in a Reuters poll and reversing 1.3% growth in the fourth quarter.

Highlighting the challenges in domestic demand, private consumption shrank 6.4% on-quarter to mark the worst reading since a 13.8% contraction in the first quarter of 1998, during the Asia Financial Crisis.

"The economy is likely to contract for at least another quarter as hard times will continue for exports," Moon Jung-hui, an economist at KB Bank said. "Consumption will improve especially on increased fiscal expenditure, but exports of key items including petrochemical products will suffer." Since late January, the economy has been paralysed by self-isolation measures across the country, which kept businesses and shops closed and workers stuck at home.

South Korea has largely managed to bring the outbreak under control and has recently reported daily new cases of about 10. Total cases were at 10,702 as of midnight Wednesday. The government on Sunday began relaxing some social distancing rules, but the economy is spiraling toward its first technical recession since 2003, defined as two straight quarters of decline, as the pandemic stymies an export recovery.

ECB Agrees to Accept Junk Bonds to Keep Economies Afloat

PARIS (AFP) - European Central Bank governors agreed Wednesday that banks could put up so-called "junk" bonds as collateral when borrowing from the Frankfurt institution, in case eurozone governments and firms see their credit ratings downgraded as they grapple with the coronavirus pandemic.

"Marketable assets and issuers of these assets... that met the minimum credit quality requirements on 7 April 2020 ... will continue to be eligible in the case of rating downgrades," the ECB said in a statement, in a process it referred to as "grandfathering".

The ECB has already taken a series of measures easing the requirements for collateral "to ensure that banks have sufficient assets that they can mobilise as collateral ...

and to continue providing funding to the euro area economy," the statement said.

As well as massively expanding its so-called "quantitative easing" (QE) bond-buying programme to 1.1 trillion euros (\$1.2 trillion) this year, the ECB is offering banks access to vast amounts of cash via low-interest loans.

The aim is to keep credit flowing to the real economy to cushion the financial blow from coronavirus-fighting shutdowns.

But in order to access that liquidity, banks must still put up collateral, often in the shape of government or other debt on their books.

Normally, that debt must be rated above a certain level by private-sector ratings agency like Moody's or Standard and Poor's (S&P).

If government or other debt is downgraded to junk status, that could rule it out as collateral - hobbling banks' ability to keep lending and potentially forcing them to sell the debt, further dragging down economic activity.

But the eligibility of collateral will now be "grandfathered", effectively disregarding possible downgrades until September 2021.

In doing so, the ECB's governing council aims to avoid such "procyclical" effects on upcoming rounds of its low-interest loan scheme, known as TLTRO.

In future, "the ECB may decide, if and when necessary, to take additional measures to further mitigate the impact of rating downgrades," the central bank said.

A source close to the ECB told AFP that this could be a veiled reference to making some junk bonds eligible for purchase under its QE scheme.

News that governors would be discussing junk bonds "has 'Italy' written all over it," ING analysts wrote ahead of a telephone conference late Wednesday. An S&P review later this week means "there is a risk Italian debt could start its slide to junk status," the bank experts warned, adding that large amounts of corporate debt could also be downgraded.

Bankruptcy Looms Over U.S. Energy Industry

NEW YORK (Reuters) - U.S. shale producers, refiners and pipeline companies are scrambling for cash and face likely restructuring as they struggle under heavy debt loads and a dual supply/demand shock in the worst crisis the oil industry has faced.

Fuel demand has tumbled roughly 30% worldwide due to the coronavirus pandemic, and just as the health crisis worsened a price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia flooded markets with crude. The industry was already struggling to satisfy investors unhappy with weak returns, even as the United States surged to become the world's largest oil producer in the last few years.

That perilous position was before U.S. prices crashed deep into negative territory on Monday, as much as \$38 per barrel in the red. This sudden rout came despite substantial spending and output cuts having already been announced by U.S. producers, and reflected a price environment well below levels that companies and advisors had modeled in worst-case scenarios, according to energy lawyers.

Approximately half of the top 60 independent U.S. oil producers will likely need to review options for securing more liquidity, according to energy lawyers at Haynes and Boone.

"The reverberations from this price collapse will be felt throughout the industry and by everyone who provides services to the industry," said Buddy Clark, an Houston-based partner at the firm.

Companies that used debt to fund acquisitions before prices crashed, such as oil giant Occidental Petroleum Corp, are focusing on placating shareholders and preserving cash.

Numerous midstream companies backed by private equity are in danger of bankruptcy, according to some of the more than a dozen industry and financial sources Reuters spoke to for this article, while large banks are preparing to become owners of oil and gas fields as they seize energy assets.



One midstream company, Salt Creek Midstream, which operates in the Delaware basin in Texas, had already hired Jefferies Financial Group (JEF.N) and law firm Kirkland & Ellis for debt advice before the week's events, according to three sources aware of the matter, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss non-public information.

Salt Creek and its advisers declined to comment, as did private equity investors Ares Management Corp and ARM Energy. More shale producers are expected to seek bankruptcy protection in coming weeks, industry and banking sources say, following Whiting Petroleum, which announced such steps earlier this month. Many small and mid-sized producers, including Chesapeake Energy Corp, have retained debt advisers.

The forecast loan default rate for 2020 among energy companies is 18%, according to Fitch Ratings, while nearly 20% of all energy corporate bonds are trading below 70 cents on the dollar, indicating distress, according to data from MarketAxess.

40% of Passengers to Wait 6 Months for Air Travel



LONDON (Dispatches) - Around the world, 40% of passengers are planning to wait at least six months or more for air travel due to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, according to a survey conducted by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Meanwhile, 60% anticipate that they could return to airline travel after one to two months of containment of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IATA said in a statement.

"Passenger confidence will suffer a double whammy even after the pandemic is contained -- hit by personal economic concerns in the face of a looming recession on top of lingering concerns about the safety of travel," Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's director general and CEO said in the statement.

"Governments and industry must be quick and coordinated with confidence-boosting measures," he added. In countries where new coronavirus cases have fallen to low levels, there are indications that passengers are returning to their travel behavior in a cautious manner, the IATA said, but added "an immediate rebound from the catastrophic fall in passenger demand appears unlikely."

"People still want to travel," said de Juniac, adding "As countries lift restrictions, confidence boosting measures will be critical to restart travel and stimulate economies." "The passenger business came to a halt with unilateral government actions to stop the spread of the virus. The industry restart, however, must be built with trust and collaboration ... We must start building a framework for a global approach that will give people the confidence that they need to travel once again," he explained.

IATA said it estimates around 25 million jobs in aviation and its related value-chains, including the tourism sector, are at risk due to the COVID-19 crisis.

While passenger revenues are expected to be \$314 billion, or 55%, less this year than in 2019, demand in the second quarter of 2020 is estimated to plummet by 80% or more compared to the same period of last year, according to the IATA. IATA represents some 290 airlines comprising 82% of global air traffic.

Health Minister Urges WHO To Seek Removal of Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education Saeed Namaki called on the World Health Organization to end the oppressive sanctions that are putting pressure on Iran's economy and health as a tight ring, and for this organization to be effective in this process.

"It is a source of pride for us and our colleagues to be

able to achieve a great honor for the country during the time of the oppressive sanctions and to be recognized as a successful country in the global arena," Namaki said after a videoconference meeting with secretary general of World Health Organization and health ministers of the Eastern Mediterranean Region.



UN Chief Warns That Coronavirus Poses a Risk to Human Rights

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Thursday that the coronavirus pandemic is "a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis."

The U.N. chief said in a video message that there is discrimination in the delivery of public services to tackle COVID-19 and there are "structural inequalities that impede access to them."

Guterres said the pandemic has also seen "disproportionate effects on certain communities, the rise of hate speech, the targeting of vulnerable groups, and the risks of heavy-handed security responses undermining the health response."

He warned that with "rising ethno-nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and a push back against human rights in some countries, the crisis can provide a pretext to adopt repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic."

In February, Guterres issued a call to action to countries, businesses and people to help renew and revive human rights across the globe, laying out a seven-point plan amid concerns about climate change, conflict and repression.

"As I said then, human rights cannot be an afterthought in times of crisis — and we now face the biggest international crisis in generations," he said.

The secretary-general said he was releasing a report Thursday on how human rights must guide the response to the virus and recovery from the pandemic. Neither he nor the report name any countries or parties responsible for human rights violations.

Guterres said governments must be "transparent, responsive and accountable," and stressed that press freedom, civil society organizations, the private sector and "civic space" are essential.

The report said governments also need to take action to mitigate the worst impacts of COVID-19 on jobs, livelihoods, access to basic services and family life.

Guterres said any emergency measures — including states of emergency — must be



"legal, proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory, have a specific focus and duration, and take the least intrusive approach possible to protect public health."

"Emergency powers may be needed but broad executive powers, swiftly granted with minimal oversight, carry risks," the report warned. "Heavy-handed security responses undermine the health response and can exacerbate existing threats to peace and security or create new ones."

The report said the best response is proportionate to the immediate threat and protects human rights.

"The message is clear: People — and their rights — must be front and center," Guterres said.

WHO Chief Says Virus Will Be With the World for a Long Time



GENEVA (Reuters) - The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said that he hoped the Trump administration would reconsider its suspension of funding, but that his main focus was on ending the pandemic and saving lives.

There were "worrying upward trends" in early epidemics in parts of Africa and central and South America, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"Most countries are still in the early stages of their epidemics and some that were affected early in the pandemic are starting to see a resurgence in cases," Tedros told Geneva journalists in a virtual briefing.

"Make no mistake we have a long way to go. This virus will be with us for a long time," he said, while noting that epidemics in Western Europe appear to be stabilising or declining.

U.S. President Donald Trump last week criticised the WHO's handling of the pandemic and announced he was suspending funding to the U.N. agency. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday said the United States strongly believes that China's ruling Communist party failed to report the outbreak of the new coronavirus in a timely manner to the WHO.

"I hope the freezing of the funding will be reconsidered and the U.S. will once again support WHO's work and continue to save lives," Tedros said. "I hope the U.S. believes that this an important investment, not just to help others but for the U.S. to stay safe also."

The WHO's top emergencies expert Dr. Mike Ryan warned against opening up global travel too quickly, saying it would require "careful risk management".

He noted surges in infections in Africa such as a nearly 300 percent increase in cases in Somalia in the past week. "We are at the beginning in Africa," Ryan said.

Saudi Supertankers Stranded as Oil Price War Backfires

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia has made good on its early-March promise to flood the world with oil, but with demand collapsing and storage filling fast, the world's top oil exporter must now keep its unsold crude on supertankers at sea as no one is rushing to take delivery of oil they can't process or store.

Around the world, at least one in every ten very large crude carriers (VLCCs)—each capable of holding 2 million barrels of oil—currently acts as a floating storage, oil officials from Saudi Arabia told The Wall Street Journal this week. Many of the supertankers carry Saudi crude, and some of it is not sold yet.

As buying interest in the oil industry is currently only focused on available storage capacity, not on crude oil, the early Saudi plan to go after its rivals' market shares with aggressive price discounts and a fleet of more oil is backfiring while a large part of the world is under lockdown, refiners slash run rates, and storage fills up.

At the same time, the highest number of Saudi oil



shipments in years are making their way to the United States this month, threatening to make an already dire situation in the U.S. oil industry even worse.

The tankers were loaded before OPEC+ struck a new agreement to take

9.7 million bpd off the market in May and June when Saudi Arabia had embarked on an aggressive price war for market share after the previous OPEC+ deal collapsed in early March.

However, three weeks later, the world demands anything but more oil—demand is crashing by 30 million barrels per day (bpd), and even the new production reduction agreement can't do anything to erase the glut in April and the coming weeks.

"The fact is buyers don't have storage so regardless of whatever level of output you want, there won't be storage for it," a senior Saudi Aramco executive told the Journal, adding that the Kingdom may have to shut part of its own production because there simply isn't demand for crude oil.

Aluminum Output Jumps by More Than 30%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's production of aluminum would jump by more than 63 percent in the current calendar year ending March 2021 to reach over 430,000 metric tons, says the country's minister for industries.

Reza Rahmani said that the total output for aluminum in the past calendar year ending March 19 topped 276,000 tons. He said output would jump in the year ahead with the opening of SALCO, Iran's massive aluminum smelter in the southern province of Fars.

"The aforementioned project has been completed in the city of Lamerd in Fars Province with an output capacity of 300,000 tons (a year) with an investment of around \$1.2 billion," said Rahmani, adding that by opening SALCO, Iran's total output capacity for aluminum would reach 785,000 tons a year.

He added that SALCO would be the only aluminum plant in Iran benefitting from all components of aluminum production chain, including smelter, anode making and storage facilities, in one single location.

Iran is to open one of the largest aluminum smelters in the Middle East with over \$1bn in investment.

The minister said the plant would enjoy the services of an exclusive port terminal on the Persian Gulf for the purpose of the exports of its products; a structure he said had cost the government more than \$170 million to build.

SALCO is jointly owned by IMIDRO, Iran's government-run holding for mining and metals, and Ghadir Investment Company, where Iran's Social Security Organization and pension funds related to the armed forces are the main shareholders.

The plant is expected to directly employ more than 1,500 people, mostly from the local people, while 5,000 more jobs would be created on the company's wider supply chain. A first phase of the giant aluminum smelter had been planned to open in November but it was delayed because of a series of logistics issues.

Tehran Promises...

FROM PAGE 1

After Iran's announcement of the launch of a military reconnaissance satellite on Wednesday, Trump wrote on Twitter, without citing any specific incident: "I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea."

General Abolfazl Shekarchi, a spokesman for Iran's armed forces, called Trump "a bully" after issuing the threat.

At the Pentagon on Wednesday, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Hyten, welcomed Trump's tweet as a useful warning to Iran. He drew a parallel between last week's naval encounter in the Gulf and Wednesday's space launch, which he said was "just another example of Iranian malign behavior".

"And it goes right along with the harassment from the fastboats ... You put those two things together and it's just more examples of Iranian malign behaviour and misbehaviour," Hyten said.

Iran considers the heavy U.S. military presence in the Middle East a threat to its security.

Senior Pentagon officials gave no indication that Trump had directed a fundamental change in military policy on Iran.

"The president issued an important warning to the Iranians," David Norquist, the deputy secretary of defence, said when asked about the tweet. "What he was emphasising is all of our ships retain the right of self-defence."

But Representative Elaine Luria, a Democrat and Navy veteran, said Trump's tweeting could lead to war.

"The president's continued issuing of orders to our military via tweet is a threat to our national security and, if followed without clear guidance and rules of engagement, will unnecessarily escalate tensions with Iran and possibly lead to all-out-conflict," she said. Asked whether the tweet means a repeat of last week's incident in the Gulf would require a lethal US response, Hyten said: "I would have to be the captain of the ship in order to make that determination."

Noor-1 Satellite...

FROM PAGE 1

Above all, when enemies' media skipped through such an important event, it means they have been badly shocked. While pandemic Coronavirus has gripped most of the countries in the world and in the condition global economy is facing important change, taking such a brave action would definitely stupefy many people.

That we emphasize that all scientific, technical and innovations used in this achievement are all domestic-made and achievements of our scientists is source of pride. The Supreme Leader in his remarks this year reiterated that in order to stand against the cruelty, one should be strong and become strong and this power itself will be a deterrent force against greedy aliens. So this action of the IRGC showed that on path of obeying velayat, it paves the ground for more reliance to the sublime stance of the velayat and moving in this direction. Today whole world is watching Iran's outstanding success which is hailed among the pure and honest people and creates hatred among the filthy people, and this is exactly practicing Islam's real tawalli (associate oneself with the Imams (A) and the leaders of religion and to submit to their velayat) and tabarra (dissociate oneself from the enemies of God and the enemies of religion's authorities) and de facto acting Islam's instructions.



IRGC...

FROM PAGE 1

"During the Ain al-Assad operation we believed the Americans would respond and we had prepared 400 targets, but they did not," he said.

A few days following the assassination of General Soleimani, Iran launched salvos of missiles at two bases housing US troops in Iraq's western Anbar Province and Kurdistan regional capital, Erbil.

Despite the attacks leading to widespread destruction and casualties, Washington did not follow up on its vow to attack if Tehran targeted U.S. assets in response to General Soleimani's assassination.

In a tweet on Thursday, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani also said that "new surprises are on the way" as the country battles US sanctions and pressure alongside the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Meanwhile An Iranian commander says the military satellite launched by the IRGC into orbit on Wednesday is to carry out reconnaissance and strategic support missions.

Brigadier General Ali Jafarzadeh made the remarks in a televised interview on Thursday, explaining the main task of the satellite. "Our first local satellite is going to carry out reconnaissance operations. In the defence sector, we need to have positional and military awareness about our forces, and the sensors installed on the satellite will do this job for us."

In the civilian and humanitarian field, especially at the time of natural disasters the IRGC plays a key role, and it needs support at these times, but sometimes the weather is so bad that choppers and drones cannot be dispatched, added the Iranian commander.

The satellites are placed in the orbit some hundred kilometres over the places in which disasters have happened. They can monitor all the region completely.

"For example, during Khuzestan province flooding, the scope was so broad that drones and helicopters could not reach the affected regions. So, there is a need for having satellite in these regions, and we will use the Noor in the IRGC's humanitarian operations," stressed Jafarabadi.

About the coordinates of "Noor", he said this satellite is ranked among the types that are placed in s range of 430 kilometres.

Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

She added that Iran has made it clear that it does not intend to develop nuclear weapons, unlike the US, which has over the past months unveiled several plans to expand its nuclear arsenal.

"There are no, there have never been, and hopefully there will never be nuclear weapons in Iran. Iran, adhering to the resolution, does not develop, test or use ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons, unlike the United States, which surprises the world every single day with news about plans to develop their nuclear missile capabilities," she said.

The remarks came after Pompeo said Iran needed "to be held accountable" for the launch, claiming that the move violated UNSC Resolution 2231.

This is while the resolution in question calls on Iran "not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology."

93 More Succumb...

FROM PAGE 1

He stated that 3,121 patients are in a critical condition.

So far, 399,927 COVID-19 diagnosis tests have been conducted in the country.

Meanwhile Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani said the plan will continue until the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which is to start as of today in Iran.

3.5 million food and hygiene packages have been prepared for the first phase, and the second phase will be implemented in the second half of the holy month, he noted.

He said the "Exercise of Relief" has started since mid-Sha'ban, and will continue until the end of the holy month of Ramadan to help the needy families amid the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Speaking at an exercise in Shahr-e Rey in southern Tehran on Thursday, he said the coronavirus was a test for all nations of the world to test their solidarity.

Cyclists “Suffer Alone” In Virtual Tour de Suisse

TAFERS (Reuters) - It is a quiet spring evening at a typical Swiss housing complex in the village of Tafers and on the balcony of a second floor apartment block, professional cyclist Kilian Frankiny is competing in the Tour de Suisse.

Like nearly all sporting events around the world, the annual race has been called off this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, like the Tour de Flanders earlier this month, organisers instead decided to hold a virtual race.

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Handscomb Optimistic Australia Will Hold T20 World Cup

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Australia batsman Peter Handscomb said he was hopeful the Twenty20 World Cup would proceed as planned later this year, citing signs other Australian sports were preparing to end COVID-19-related suspensions.

All sports including cricket are currently on hold in Australia and strict travel restrictions have cast doubt on whether the 16-nation tournament will go ahead in October and November.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SATURDAY APRIL 25, 2020

Federer Calls for ATP/WTA Merger

LONDON (Reuters) - Roger Federer called on Wednesday for a merger between the men's ATP Tour and the WTA, which runs the women's circuit, as tennis wades through a lengthy coronavirus shutdown with lower-level professionals in deep financial crisis.

The tennis season was suspended in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the hiatus will continue at least until mid-July, depriving lower-level players, who depend solely on tournament winnings, of the chance to earn a living.

"Just wondering ... am I the only one thinking that now is the time for men's and women's tennis to be united and come together as one?" 20-time Grand Slam champion Federer said on Twitter. "I am picturing a merger between the WTA and ATP."

"I am not talking about merging competition on the court, but merging the 2 governing bodies (ATP and WTA) that oversee the men's and women's professional tours ..."

Tennis enjoys a massive worldwide following but its governance remains fractious with as many as seven associations running different parts of the game.

Besides the ATP and the WTA Tours, the sport is also controlled by the International Tennis Federation and the boards of the four Grand Slam tournaments.

"It's too confusing for the fans when there are different ranking systems, different logos, different websites, different tournament categories," the 38-year-old Swiss continued.

"It probably should have happened a long time ago, but maybe now is really the time."

"These are tough times in every sport and we can come out of this with 2 weakened bodies or 1 stronger body." Responding to Federer's suggestion in a statement to Reuters, ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said tennis now had a "big opportunity" to create unity.

"Recent cooperation between governing bodies has only strengthened my belief that a unified sport is the surest way to maximise our potential and to deliver an optimal experience for fans on-site, on television and online," he said.

"To that end, I welcome the views of our players. Tennis has always led the way when it comes to putting men and women together on the biggest stages — it's one of our strengths, and sets us apart from many other sports."

"We look forward to continued collaboration and discussions with the WTA and other stakeholders across all aspects of our business."

WTA chairman and CEO Steve Simon said the WTA had been in regular contact with the ATP about the return to tournament competition and looked forward to "continuing discussions on how we can effectively work together."

"I have long stated that we are at our best as a sport when we can work together, and the recent weeks have highlighted that fact," he said in a statement.

Federer's views drew support from past and present players.



"I agree, and have been saying so since the early 1970s. One voice, women and men together, has long been my vision for tennis," American great Billie Jean King, who created the WTA in 1973, said on Twitter.

"The WTA on its own was always Plan B. I'm glad we are on the same page. Let's make it happen." Rafa Nadal, the other member of the so-called 'Big 3' alongside Federer and Novak Djokovic, also voiced his support. "Hey @rogerfederer as you know per our discussions I completely agree that it would be great to get out of this world crisis with the union of men's and women's tennis in one only organisation," he said.

However, outspoken Australian Nick Kyrgios sounded less enthused.

"Did anyone ask the majority of the ATP what they think about merging with the WTA and how it is good for us?" the world number 40 wrote on social media.

While tennis is a lucrative sport for those at the top, those in the lower echelons struggle to make ends meet. The ATP Tour, the WTA, along with the ITF and organisers of the four Grand Slams, have in recent weeks joined forces to create a relief fund to help the lower-level players who cannot make an income during the shutdown.

Djokovic, the head of the ATP player council, said he feared many in the lower tier will give up the sport and called on fellow professionals to help them.

Bale Gives £500,000 to Special Cardiff Hospital



CARDIFF (Dispatches) - Wales Cattaacker Gareth Bale said that he had donated £500,000 (\$615,000) to the hospital where he was born to help in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Real Madrid's Bale, 30, who has won four Champions League titles since joining the Spanish giants in 2013, made the announcement in a Twitter post by the Cardiff and Vale Health Board.

"I just wanted to make this video to thank everybody in the NHS for their hard work and sacrifice during this COVID-19 crisis," he said.

"The University Hospital of Wales holds a special place in my heart, it's where I was born and it's provided great support to my friends, my family and the wider community."

"Me and my family we'd like to show our support. Keep up the good work, you're doing an amazing job and thank you very much," he added.

As of Wednesday 624 people had died from the illness in Wales with more than 8,000 cases recorded. Spain's La Liga has been suspended since March 12 due to the outbreak but football authorities in the country have agreed on a return to protocol for professional players.

Leclerc Likes Idea of Reverse Races When F1 Returns

LONDON (Reuters) - Ferrari's Charles Leclerc likes the idea of racing in the "wrong" direction once Formula One emerges from the global COVID-19 lockdown.

The sport is considering various options to get its stalled season started, with grands prix likely to be held without spectators and some European circuits hosting more than one race.

There has even been a somewhat fanciful suggestion that the British Grand Prix circuit at Silverstone might host back-to-back races clockwise and anti-clockwise on the same or successive weekends.

Leclerc, holed up in the Monaco apartment where he has been strumming his guitar, playing the piano, winning esports races and working on improving very basic cooking skills, said he would be up for that.

"I've seen something about doing races the other way around, that would be very, very cool," the 22-year-old told reporters in an online news conference. "This could be an interesting idea."

"We would definitely have to re-learn the track completely from scratch. I've done this in karting, to do one track in one way and then do it the other way."

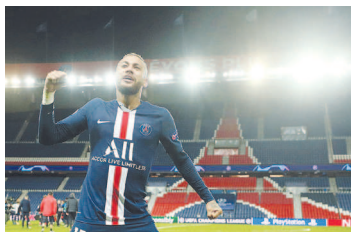
"I think it would be very exciting to do a track like Silverstone the other way around, to arrive so quick in Becketts and then Maggotts would be very exciting."

Silverstone's managing director Stuart Pringle said this month that the idea was maybe not so crazy but, asked about Leclerc's comments, recognised there were too many obstacles to overcome.

"Very few circuits are built for use in both directions and Silverstone is no exception," he told Reuters. "All of the important safety aspects are designed and installed for clockwise racing. "Whilst we have the space to be able to extend the run off areas, realistically we don't have the time, or in the current climate, the ability to do so."

Asked whether it would be fair to hold multiple races at the same track, given that some cars are better suited to certain circuits, Leclerc said it was a reflection of special circumstances. "I think you can always argue the fairness but at the end we mostly need to look at the situation and try to make the most out of it," he said.

Neymar Says Lack of Football Making Him Anxious



PARIS (Reuters) - Paris St Germain and Brazil forward Neymar says that not knowing when football will be played again is making him anxious.

The 28-year-old is preparing for an eventual return at his home in a gated community in Brazil under the supervision of Ricardo Rosa, his long-standing physical trainer.

Despite Rosa's best efforts to keep him active with a varied daily routine, Neymar said that absence of football due to the COVID-19 pandemic was weighing on him.

"Not knowing when we will play again is causing anxiety. I miss playing, competing, the atmosphere of the club and my PSG team mates. It's a real longing for football!" he said on his website.

"I'm sure that the fans want to see everyone back on the pitch, the earlier the better. I hope the decision is made as quickly as possible," added Neymar, who had scored 18 goals in 22 appearances for PSG before the season was halted in March.

Rosa said that his main job was not to add to the pressure which Neymar is already under.

"You need to understand the environment that this player lives in," he said. "I try to relieve this by controlling the training load and nutrition. Everything is done so his performance improves and evolves all the time."

Liverpool Are Not Finished Article

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klopp believes there is still room for improvement from Liverpool despite their incredible Premier League campaign, which is on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Reds were 25 points clear of second-placed Manchester City and on the verge of their first top-flight title since 1990 when football was halted last month.

But Klopp said Liverpool, who won the Champions League last year and have only lost one Premier League match all season, could get even better.

"We will not change, that's the first thing, but whether we will be successful depends on what other clubs are doing as well because they have all the chance to improve things, do things better," he told Sky Sports.

"So I have no clue what the future will hold for us. But we will not change, this team is not the finished article, and we have a lot of space for improvement, and we work on that."

"We have fresh blood internally coming through. We can improve with this team, which is great."

Klopp does not believe football should be "forced back" after the COVID-19 shutdown but admitted it could have a positive impact on the mood of the country.

There is no end in sight to the football lockdown in England but German football authorities are set to announce plans for Bundesliga matches to restart in empty stadiums on May 9.



Impossible To Delay Olympics Again

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The Tokyo 2020 Olympics cannot be delayed beyond the year-long postponement already forced by the coronavirus outbreak, the organizing committee's president has warned in comments published Thursday.

Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori said there is "absolutely no" chance of postponing the Games beyond their rescheduled July 23, 2021 opening, according to Kyodo News agency.

"Also thinking about athletes and issues over Games management, it is technically difficult to delay it by two years," Mori was quoted as saying.

Mori said he had earlier asked Prime Minister Shinzo Abe whether Japan should consider a two-year postponement but "the prime minister decided that one year is the way to go".

Under heavy pressure from athletes and sports associations, Japanese organizers and the International Olympic Committee in March agreed to a year-long postponement of the Games.

Organizers and Japanese officials have said the delayed Olympics will be a chance to showcase the world's triumph over the coronavirus, but questions have arisen about whether even a year's postponement is sufficient.

Earlier this week, a Japanese expert who has criticized the country's response to the coronavirus warned he is "very pessimistic" that the postponed Olympics can be held in 2021.

