

Turkey's Export of Chemical Products to Iran Amounted to Over \$82m From January Through March 2020 Decreasing By 37.46 Percent Compared To the Same Period of 2019

IRAN NEWS

Bosnia and Herzegovina Foreign Minister Bisera Turkovic Reportedly Emphasized to Use Iran's Experience in Fighting Against the Coronavirus

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Leader Advises People To Observe Ramadan's Rituals in Solitude

TEHRAN (IP) - The main purpose of performing acts of worship during Ramadan and other months is the evolution of human beings and the establishment of a communication with God from the heart. It turns out that priority is given to the health of the people, so it is recommended to perform religious acts at home and with family members.

Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, advised people not to hold public meetings, prayers, and speeches during the holy month of Ramadan this year and advised them to worship, supplicate and be humble in solitude, at homes, and among families.

Another blessing of the holy month of Ramadan is to achieve growth in individual and social dimensions, charity, and help, especially in this ordeal and such days, causes individual growth, which is the prelude to the social growth of any society.

Given the spread of Corona disease and the difficult living conditions for some people, the help and empathy of all people, especially Muslims, is needed to eradicate the disease and help those in need.

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President Says Religious Sites May Reopen

TEHRAN (IFP) - In an address to a meeting of the chairpersons of specialized committees of the Coronavirus Fight National Headquarters on Saturday, President Rouhani pointed to a report from the Ministry of Health and Medical Education about the achievement of "relatively satisfactory conditions" in the battle with the novel coronavirus, saying the close cooperation from the people and observance of the health protocols is a source of pride in the country.

"If the popular cooperation continues in parallel with the arrangements that have been made, we can be hopeful to some extent about cutting off the chain of outbreak of the disease," the president noted.

He also emphasized that the Iranian health officials, religious authorities and clerics share a common concern about the health of people and creating an acceptable situation for the resumption of religious rituals, adding, "One can be hopeful that under circumstances that the indices of controlling the disease are improved, the country's religious centers might reopen by defining conditions and instructions."

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Iran Witnessing "Declining Trend" In Coronavirus Deaths, Infections



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry says the country is witnessing a "declining trend" in the number of fatalities and cases of new coronavirus infections as a result of bilateral cooperation between the people and the government.

Iraj Harirchi, the deputy minister of health, announced in Tehran Saturday that more than 50 percent of coronavirus cases, and about 70 percent of coronavirus-related deaths have decreased across the country.

"There is a declining trend in corona disease in most provinces and this has been the result of effective actions by the people and the government," Harirchi said.

"I would like to emphasize that at a time when smart and gradual social distancing takes place, any violation can have serious and irreparable consequences," he added.

The deputy health minister also predicted that there would be "two to three outbreaks" over a year in most of the world's countries before the discovery of corona vaccines and drugs, underlining that people should stick to the stay-at-home slogan and avoid unnecessary commuting.

In a meeting of senior officials in charge of the National Headquarters for Managing and Fighting the Coronavirus in Tehran on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani expressed optimism that the chain of transmission would break "to some extent" in the country as long as people continue to follow the guidelines drawn up by the government.

"We are on the path to control the disease but if the level of warnings and awareness of the people decreases, the disease may peak," Rouhani said. "In this situation, we have to reinstate the restrictions. Of course, we hope that people will continue to take warnings seriously and not leave home except for their livelihood."

"The path to fighting and controlling this disease definitely cannot be traversed without the support of the people."

Iran's Health Ministry announced a day earlier that the country was no longer "in the red" as the daily death toll from the coronavirus had begun to slow.

Meanwhile Head of Iran's Health Ministry's Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour said on Saturday that 68,193 people out of a total of 89,328 infected with the coronavirus have survived while 5,650 have unfortunately succumbed to death.

Jahanpour said that 1,134 new affected cases have been detected since yesterday.

Over the last 24 hours, 76 people died due to the deadly virus, he added.

The Iranian official noted that 3,096 cases are in critical condition.

He went on to say that 410,075 tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

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

Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda Commit War Crimes in Yemen

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Saudi Arabia and the al-Qaeda militant group have reportedly been committing war crimes against the oppressed Yemeni nation in the form an "unholy" alliance.

The MintPress News, an online news website, reported on Friday that Saudi mercenaries and members of al-Qaeda's branch in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, called al-Qaeda in the Arabian report said.

"In al-Jawf, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and AQAP was well underway by 2016 when the Kingdom launched a military campaign to take the province. Saudi and AQAP forces fought side by side, sharing the same weapons, trenches, operations command centers, resting places, and extremist ideals," it added.

Peninsula (AQAP), closed their ranks in the beginning of the war on Yemen and jointly occupied the Jawf province using the same US-supplied weapons.

"Since 2015, when Saudi Arabia announced from Washington D.C. that it had launched a military campaign against the poorest country in the Middle East, it has been an open secret that both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had formed an unholy union with al-Qaeda's branch in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, known colloquially as AQAP, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," the

The report also noted that al-Qaeda boosted its recruitment in Yemen under the Saudi backing and turned Jawf into its stronghold in the impoverished country.

"AQAP has hobbled by in Yemen for years, feeding off the relentless cycle of poverty and hunger and only occasionally emerging from the shadows to claim credit for an attack or seek new recruits. It was not until 2015 when the group began to receive support from Saudi Arabia that it became brazen enough to emerge from its hiding places into the streets of al-Jawf's towns. Generous Saudi backing meant that AQAP could boost recruitment, build new training camps and promote the organization's ideology, an offshoot of the official Saudi state religion of Wahhabism," it said.

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China's Imports From Iran Drop 52% In Q1 of 2020

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The latest figures released by China's customs show imports from Iran dropped 52.7 percent in the first quarter of 2020, reaching an all-time low of \$1.8 billion.

China released its trade figures on Friday April 24, showing its exports to Iran grew by 16 percent reaching over \$2.1 billion, in the same quarter compared with 2019.

The main reason for the drop of imports from Iran is U.S. sanctions that have cut off most of its crude exports. China was the biggest customer of Iranian oil, importing hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil from Iran before full U.S. sanctions kicked in last May.

This is the first time in recent decades when China's exports to Iran surpassed its imports, leaving Tehran with a trade imbalance with Beijing.

Iran was exporting 2.5 million barrels of crude daily in 2018, before U.S. sanctions were imposed. Now, according to the latest data by tanker tracking companies it exports just 170,000 barrels a day, with China taking 82,000 barrels and the rest going to Syria.

The International Monetary Fund forecasts Iran's to have an \$18 billion trade deficit in 2020, due to lack of oil exports. This deficit can get much bigger if oil prices stay low, hurting the prices of oil by-products and natural gas.

India Gets Fresh Export Orders for Tea, Basmati From Iran

KOLKATA (Dispatches) - Iran, China and Russia have placed fresh orders for Indian black tea in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak, a boost for the domestic industry which has incurred losses of about 100 million kg of teas owing to the lockdown. West Asian nations led by Iran have also placed orders for basmati rice, but traders are likely to miss the crucial Ramzan period, April 23-May 23, as it takes 40-45 days to ship the consignments.

Mohit Agarwal, director, Asian Tea, told ET: "There is good demand from Iran for orthodox teas. Their banks have opened and payments for the earlier consignments are coming. Exporters are buying privately since the auction centres are yet to open."

Prices of tea have firmed up by 7-8% compared from that a year ago, to Rs 280-300 per kg, he said.

Serica Says Partly Iranian-Owned North Sea Rhum Field Performing Well

LONDON (Dispatches) - UK independent Serica Energy reported strong production from its partly Iranian-owned Rhum gas field and other North Sea assets and said it was well positioned to weather the recent market turmoil.

In a statement, Serica said oil and gas output at the Rhum, Bruce and Keith field cluster had risen 15% last year to just over 27,300 b/d of oil equivalent, following the company's purchase of stakes in the fields from BP and other partners in 2018. Production this year from the two main fields, Rhum and Bruce, had been even stronger, thanks to a focus on maintaining "up time" at the facilities, CEO Mitch Flegg told S&P Global Platts.

Serica bought BP's 50% stake in Rhum after obtaining from Washington a waiver of US sanctions against Iran, which has owned the other 50% of the license since before the Iranian Revolution. The field first started producing in 2005, but production had to be suspended in 2010-14 due to sanctions.

The current sanctions waiver, which has to be renewed annually, entails placing Iranian revenues in an escrow account. Rhum produced 159 MMcf/d of gas last year, plus around 1,000 b/d of oil, according to regulator the Oil & Gas Authority. BP originally planned for Rhum to produce from three wells, but technical problems at one well meant only two have ever been used. Serica plans remediation work for the third well, but said Thursday this might be deferred to 2021, adding that production from the third well might anyway hit constraints with processing capacity at the Bruce facility.

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Islamic Revolution Leader Condolences Demise of Ayatollah Amini

TEHRAN (MNA) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution has expressed condolences over the demise of Ayatollah Ebrahim Amini, a member of Iran’s Expediency Council. In a message on Saturday, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei praised Ayatollah Amini’s services to the Islamic Revolution in different fields, also noting that prominent scholar has always pursued acquiring and offering

Islamic knowledge.

The Leader went on to express condolences to the honorable family of Ayatollah Amini and to the seminary society of Qom.

After suffering a long period of illness, the prominent religious scholar passed away in a hospital in the central city of Qom on Friday.

Iran Will Never Start Conflict, Tension in Region

TEHRAN (IFP) – President Hassan Rouhani says Iran will never start conflict, tension in the region.

Rouhani made the remarks in a phone conversation with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on Saturday.

His comments came after the escalation of tension between Iran and the U.S. in the Persian Gulf, especially following the IRGC Navy’s warning to US warships and the subsequent anti-Iran threats made by U.S. President Donald Trump.

In the Saturday phone call, President Rouhani further congratulated the Qatari government and nation on the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan.

He expressed hope this month will bring diving blessings upon the Muslim community.



The Qatari Emir, in turn, expressed congratulations to Iranian people on the holy occasion, and urged all countries to make efforts to stave off tension in the region.

During the phone call, both sides described Tehran-Doha relations as positive and growing. They also emphasized the need to forge closer ties on all fronts.

Iran Deserves to Acquire Technological Development

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran’s government spokesman said on Saturday that Iran deserves to acquire civil and military technological development as its inseparable and uncompromising right of the states, adding that the threats made by U.S. wouldn’t affect Iran’s resolve to advance.

“Unfortunately at a time when people around the world must unite to fight against coronavirus, we observe such statements from US officials. We believe that the region must move towards peace so that we can fight the virus. The world is in need of physical and psychological security to pass through this crisis,” the spokesman of Iran’s government Ali Rabiei said.

Rabiei said that the U.S. officials are looking for scapegoat when their wrong policy backfires.



“We understand that in the difficult conditions caused by the coronavirus outbreak in the United States, the US government, its President in particular, sees no way forward except shifting the blame in order to deviate the public opinion from their failure in fighting COVID-19 and also their international responsibilities.”

He said that the United States accuses Iran of violating UN Security Council Resolution 2231 at a time when Washington has withdrawn since 2017. The spokesman made it clear that Iran abides by the UNSC Resolution and never violated its terms.

Rabiei advised Europeans to “learn lessons from events of the past and not to heed the US bullying in a bid to make the world feel more secure in the middle of coronavirus crisis and even after that.”

France, UK Stances Stem From Their Submission to U.S. Bullying

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Friday dismissed the stances by France and UK regarding launch of Iran’s ‘Noor-1’ satellite, saying this proves their double-standard policies and submission to the U.S. bullying.

Describing France and UK’s stances regarding launch of satellite ‘Noor’ as unacceptable, he said that using spatial technology for peaceful purposes is part of Iran’s defense and scientific development programs and none of the international treaties bans it from accessing and developing the technology which has been achieved thanks to the efforts of the Iranian elites.

Mousavi categorically rejected unilateral interpretation of Resolution 2231 by France and UK, saying that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful based on Supreme Leader’s Fatwa and reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Therefore, Iran’s space program pursues defense objectives and has not been designed for purposes other than this, he reiterated.

While the U.S. has violated all provisions of the Resolution 2231 by withdrawing from the JCPOA and imposing illegal sanctions against Iran every day, it is strange to find that European states doing nothing and refusing to condemn it and this is indicative of their double-standard policies and surrendering to US bullying in the international scene.

“Ramadan an Opportunity to Renew Friendship, Solidarity”

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to France Bahram Qasemi in a message congratulated Muslims on the arrival of Ramadan, saying it is an opportunity to renew friendship and solidarity.

“On the occasion of the beginning of Ramadan, I offer my congratulations to all French Muslims,” Qasemi wrote in the official Twitter account of the Iranian mission in France, adding that in the light of its spiritual teachings, the month of Ramadan, represents the opportunity to renew friendship, solidarity and empathy.

“During these difficult days when the world faces the pandemic COVID19 pandemic, I wish peace,

tranquility, security and health for you and for all the peoples in the world,” Qasemi noted.

The holy fasting month of Ramadan is expected to start on Saturday, April 25 in Iran

The advent of Ramadan may vary from country to country depending on the situation of the moon. Since the new moon is not in the same state at the same time globally, the beginning and ending dates of Ramadan depend on what lunar sightings are received in each location.

As a result, Ramadan dates vary in different countries, but usually only by a day. This is due to the cycle of the moon.

Satellite Launch Right Move in Right Direction

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani says a recent successful launch for a home-made satellite was proof that Iran has pursued a sound policy to develop its space sector.

In comments published on Friday, the Iranian president hailed the launch of Noor military satellite earlier this week by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). It was a right move in the right direction, he said.

“This success is a sign that strengthening the space sector in the country and in the armed forces has been a correct and effective step,” Rouhani said in a phone call with Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami.

The IRGC successfully put Noor-1 (Light 1) satellite into space on April 22, a move which irritated several Western countries.

The United States claimed that the launch showed that Iran could target other countries with its long-range missiles.

Washington and allies have even called the launch a breach of a United Nations resolution on a 2015 deal on Iran’s nuclear energy program, something both Tehran and signatories to the treaty have dismissed as baseless.

Iranian authorities have stated on several occasions that the country’s missile power is solely for defense purposes.

In his Friday comments, Rouhani reiterated that Iran should do more to further strengthen its space capabilities.

“We must try and do more than before to develop it (the space sector),” the president said.

He also touched upon a series of recent “provocations” by some countries in the Persian Gulf, saying Iran should move to keep its stabilizing role in West Asia.

“While maintaining our vigilance and (our) leading presence in the region, we should carefully pursue strategies that would ensure and strengthen stability and sustainable security in the region.”

The chief executive felicitated the IRGC on the occasion of the launch operation during another phone call with the Corps’ Chief Commander Major General Hossein Salami, IRNA reported. Rouhani called the achievement a valuable and national success.

There again, Rouhani pointed to the foreigners’ provocative actions targeting the region, noting that the prowess and readiness possessed by the Iranian Armed Forces, especially the elite force, have always fitted within the framework of preserving regional stability, security, and fighting terrorism.

The Iranian defensive might “has invariably been received well by the world’s freedom-seeking people,” added the president.

U.S. Objection to IMF Loan to Iran Violation of Int’l Law and Right to Health

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran wrote in a Twitter message that U.S. objection to Iran’s loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) violates Jus Cogens of International Law and the Right to Health.

Ali Shamkhani said that other governments have two commitments: to stop cooperation with the violating government and to take measures to remove illegal condition.

Shamkhani said Europe has just always expressed sorrow! “We need to be strong.”

According to the Managing Director of the IMF Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF has decided to loan \$50b to countries fighting with the coronavirus via Rapid Financial Instrument (RFI).

Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Abdolnasser Hemmati said in mid-March that Iran had requested \$5billion loan from the IMF in the CORONA campaign package of RFI.

Iran’s demand has been opposed by the US government.

UNESCO Urged to Lobby For Lifting U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was urged on Saturday to lobby for lifting US sanctions in the pandemic era.

Head of Center for International Affairs and Overseas Schools Gholam Reza Karimi in a letter to secretary general of UNESCO national commission urges the body to try for lifting U.S.’ cruel sanctions against Iran.

Now that Iran has made all its efforts and used all its facilities for fighting coronavirus, the U.S. sanctions and maximum pressures against Iran created many problems for educational and cultural activities, Karimi said in his letter.

Referring to formation of international consensus and political campaign with regard to lifting cruel sanctions against Iran, he said that UNESCO is expected to make all its efforts for removal of sanctions and inhumane discrimination.

Over the last few years, Iran has been targeted by the most serious and cruel inhumane threats by the U.S. Administration which have paralyzed economic, educational and cultural activities.

Iranian, Qatari FMs Stress Formation Broad-Based Gov’t in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif and his Qatari counterpart Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani discussed the latest developments of Afghanistan and Iran’s efforts to help promote mutual political understanding and formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan on a phone call on Saturday.

Zarif also congratulated the foreign minister and the government, as well as the Qatari people over advent of the Holy Ramadan.

Also on Saturday morning, President Hassan Rouhani congratulated the advent of the holy month of Ramadan to the government and the Muslim people of Qatar and all Muslims around the world, expressing hope that this month would bring many blessings for the Islamic Ummah in a phone call with Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

Iran More Successful in Coronavirus Fight Than UK



TEHRAN (PressTV)- Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has hailed Iran’s endeavor in the containment of the deadly coronavirus pandemic despite Washington’s cruel sanctions, saying Tehran has even been more successful than Britain in this regard.

Speaking in a video conversation with Tehran’s Mayor Pirouz Hanachi on Friday, Khan said most of the required measures taken in London are similar to those employed in Iran.

He added that London has set strict quarantine regulations since March 23 and people were just allowed to leave their houses for buying food, going to the doctor, conducting sports exercises only once a day and going to special jobs.

Pointing on public transportation in London, Khan noted that the Underground only transfers five percent of passengers and 15 percent of people take the bus.

The London mayor also elaborated on the efforts made by British scientists to treat the novel coronavirus and said a new vaccine recently made by the Oxford University would be tested soon.

Britain is also testing a kind of antibody taken from coronavirus-infected patients who have recovered, he said, adding that an ultimate outcome remains far.

He further vowed to hold talks with British officials about problems caused in the way of Iran’s fight due to the sanctions, expressing hope that the bans would be lifted as soon as possible.

Iran has been doing its utmost to contain the respiratory disease caused by COVID-19 despite the hardships caused by the sanctions.

Tehran has repeatedly said it does not want Washington’s help in the fight, but wants the White House to lift the illegal economic sanctions so that Iran could mobilize its own resources to tackle the pandemic.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has not only defied international calls on Washington in recent weeks to halt the draconian sanctions, but has even slapped more such restrictive measures on the Islamic Republic.

The mayor of Tehran, for his part, said Iran is fighting against the new coronavirus and sanctions simultaneously.

Hanachi said sanctions have caused many problems for public transportation system in Iran “but Tehran Municipality has carried out effective measures for transferring passengers during the coronavirus pandemic while observing health protocols.”

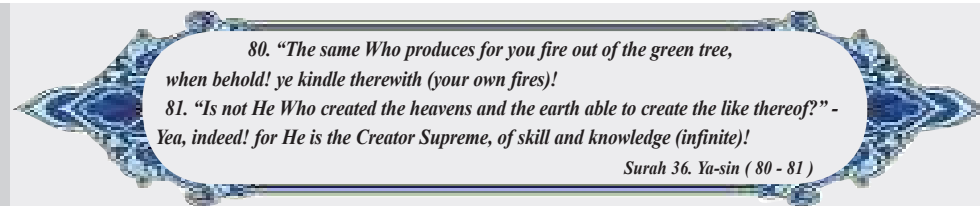
He added that in spite of the COVID-19 outbreak, startup markets started their activities in Iran and most of the services which used to be offered in person are now presented online.

He noted that Tehran Municipality made its efforts to observe all protocols and health standards in the burial service of the coronavirus victims.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:06
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:16



Iran Exports Have Potentials to Touch \$100b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Farshid Farzanegan, head of the Iran-UAE Joint Chamber of Commerce, believes Iran has huge potentials to boost its exports to \$100b annually and it needs to use all capacities.

Speaking to ILNA, Farzanegan said that unfortunately Iran does not use properly its exports potentials and sudden and continuous changes in regulations have disrupted the trade system in the country while the country has potentials to export goods at least worth of \$100b annually.

He further said that after the breakout of the Coronavirus, the demands for goods declined in different countries, adding that the slump in demand caused a fall in the global exports volume which was used directly or indirectly by costumers or they were in their provision chain. He admitted that the global trade volume inevitably dropped.

On the current favorable trade between Iran and the UAE, he said that UAE has sent humanitarian aids and it has eased the trade of medical and hygienic equipment as well as marine transit for Iran's agro and food trade.

Farzanegan noted that the marine transit still continues and the UAE eased the way for return of Iranian nationals by Mahan Airways.

He also called for revision in policy-making and regulations by those who are involved in the trade, adding that if those policies are adopted individually and not concentrated, the trade will become impossible.

He reiterated that if Iran wants to boost its trade with the regional states, it should



centralize its policies and individual policies will be useless.

Farzanegan noted that by using potentials of UAE-based Iranian nationals in trade, Iran can have better and effective presence in the international trade especially when we know the UAE is a favorable market in terms of transit, transportation and access to the regional states.

He stated Iran has this potential to dominate the regional markets especially in the Persian Gulf states because the country enjoys having abundant resources and cheap and skillful human resources comparing to other countries but it needs to prepare the necessary grounds for trade.

He deplored that Iran does not use all of its exports grounds, and sudden decisions and changes in the regulations have affect the trade otherwise the country could have exported at least goods worth of \$100b.

KSC Wins 2-Star Silver Statue of Iran-EMA

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Khorasan Steel Company managed to improve its position in the rankings in the 5th National Energy Management Awards (Iran-EMA) and won the two-star silver statue because of its achievements.



Head of Exploitation Department of Khorasan Steel Company Mr. Hamid Reza Zare announced the achievement, adding that the company won the award for its performance for implementing energy management system and using all standards for efficient energy consumption and potentials existing in this sector. The company won the award in competition with other companies in the category of industries observing all national standards for energy consumption.

He also elaborated some measures taken by the company which led to such a success like reforming energy consumption pattern and creating integrated process. He said defining and implementing some projects like signing MoU with Italian company Danieli regarding the upgrading the technology of electric arc furnace in steel-making.

Headed that the company owes this success to the efforts of staff of the company and support of energy commissions in the company. It is worthy to note that this year's ceremony was affected by the outbreak of the Coronavirus and it was held by video conference on Wednesday.

Isfahan Refinery Producing 2m Liters of Euro Standard Gasoline Per Day

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Isfahan Oil Refining Company during the meeting of director of Isfahan Tax Affairs Office to the refinery said that Isfahan refinery produced some 12m liters of gasoline per day and all produced gasoline were compliant with euro-5 standards.



Morteza Ebrahimi said that the company and refinery has prioritized its programs on environmental issues and it has carried out several mega environment projects or they are underway.

He added that 20 percent of the total area of the company has been allocated to green space and green space accounts for 36 percent of the total space of the refinery.

He noted that the refinery produces some 12m liters of gasoline per day, adding that all produced gasoline is based on euro 5 standards.

Ebrahimi further said that the refinery all produces 22m liters of gas oil per day while 2m liters are based on euro standards and it is delivered to the Isfahan Bus Company public services. He reiterated that the company is to reform its refining system and all products will be based on euro 5 standard.

On fight with Coronavirus, he said the company has assisted some 9b tomans for fighting with the virus to Isfahan Municipality and Medical Science University.

Meanwhile director of Isfahan Tax Affairs Office, for his part, hailed the actions of the refinery, adding that this big industrial company is one of the best tax payers of the office and it has helped with its timely payments.

NICICO Witnesses Surge in Production, Sales

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) says despite some ups and downs and the outbreak of Coronavirus, the company registered another success as its copper anode production rose by 14 percent in the first month of the new year.

Dr. Ardeshtir Saad Mohammadi said that due to endeavors of staff of the company and measures taken by the managers, the company saw a rise in production and sales in the first month of the current year.

He said the amount of produced copper anode in Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex and Khatoun Abad Complex hit 30,690 tons which was ahead of the schedule of 26,855 tons and it shows 14 percent growth.

According to Mr. Saad Mohammadi, NICICO produced 17,961 tons of cathode and 25,112 tons of mineral contents in the first month of the year.



He noted that the production of copper concentrate in the same period saw one percent growth, adding that the company has produced 102,907 tons of copper concentrates in the same period.

Saad Mohammadi further said that extracting sulfur ore till the end of the first month of the year from Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex, Meydook and Sungun hit 4.357m tons.

He reiterated by taking some measures and implementing some plans, NICICO will witness a surge in production in the company as it has done in the past years by setting records in sales and production.

Saad Mohammadi added that NICICO sold products worth 558b tomans in the first month and the revenue sees 66 percent growth comparing to the same period last year.

He noted some 10,820 tons of cathode and 160 tons of molybdenum sulfur worth 744b tomans have been offered by the company on Iran Mercantile Exchange.

BMI's Key Role in Launching SALCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Bank Melli Iran had a strong participation in construction and inauguration of South Aluminum Corporation (SALCO) which was inaugurated by the President on Thursday.



According to the public relations of BMI, the bank financed almost 20 percent of the fixed capital of the project which was carried out on the syndicate base.

The amount of BMI's contribution to the project is estimated over 1.5b Chinese yuan. Meanwhile in the current capital section, BMI has injected more than 2.2b rials into the project which had great impact on the progress of the project.

SALCO is located on Lamard, in Fars Province, on a land over 200 hectares with the production capacity of 300,000 tons of aluminum ingot annually.

The complex has private pier, facilities for unloading

and warehouse for storing raw materials, aimed at developing exports, increasing sustainable revenues, creating jobs and efficient using of huge gas resources of the country.

New SPM to Be Installed at SP Phase 19

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Operator of South Pars phase 19 development project says a single point mooring (SPM) has been shipped to be anchored near the phase for loading its gas condensate to vessels.

As reported by Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the giant gas field in the Persian Gulf, the SPM arrived at Pars port on Saturday morning.

According to Seyed Hossein Azimi, the installation operations of the mentioned system, which can load 7000 cubic meters of gas per hour, will be completed by the end of the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (September 21).



Noting that using SPM is one of the most common ways to transport gas condensate to tankers, the official said this floating buoy is restrained by chains and anchors that are hammered into the seabed, making the tankers able to load gas condensate without needing to come to shore.

Installing this SPM is going to increase the loading capacity of vessels at the Pars 2 export terminal and it also increases the operational flexibility for the terminal and makes it possible to perform periodic repairs of facilities.

The official said that currently the gas condensate of the phases 19 and the Pars 2 zone are loaded through the SPM of phase 12, noting that the gas condensate produced in these phases is loaded through a common mitering through a sea pipeline to the phase 12 SPM.

A Single buoy mooring, also known as single-point mooring or SPM, is a loading buoy anchored offshore, that serves as a mooring point and interconnect for tankers loading or offloading gas or liquid products.

SPMs are the link between geostatic subsea manifold connections and the tankers. They are capable of handling any tonnage ship, even very large crude carriers (VLC) where no alternative facility is available.

Over 513k Tons of Commodities Traded on IME



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Approximately 513,000 MT of commodities worth over \$595m were traded last week on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

According to the report from IME International Affairs and PR, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 146,888 MT of various products worth close to \$261m were traded.

On this trading floor, 134,888 MT of steel, 4,730 MT of copper, 5,980 MT of aluminum, 150 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 1,000 MT of coke, 140 MT of zinc ingot as well as 16 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 351,499 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$345m were traded.

On this trading floor, 75,026 MT of bitumen, 97,600 MT of VB feed stock, 84,385 MT of polymer products, 50,000 MT of lube cut oil, 22,497 MT of chemical products, 3,587 MT of base oil, 3,000 MT of slaps waxes, 734 MT of insulation, as well as 14,670 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, the side market of IME experienced trading of 15,000 MT of various commodities.

PGSOC Successful Presence in Energy Bourse

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Persian Gulf Star Oil Co. (PGSOC) announced that the company had six offers in the energy bourse and 17 agreements for selling its products in last Iranian calendar month of Farvardin.

Mohammad Ali Dadvar said that in the first month of Iranian calendar month of Farvardin, the company had six successful offers in the energy bourse and they led to signing 17 agreements for sales of the products.

He added that the total tonnage of delivery of products in all 17 agreements was 605,000 tons and the products include heavy end, light naphtha and middle naphtha.

Dadvar noted that offering light naphtha at \$45 was a successful offer and a record in the history of national energy bourse which was set by PGSOC.

He added that this innovative move of the company by offering a fuel package comprised of light, middle and heavy naphtha and heavy end, in the bourse, expressing hope it would continue in the future.

Dadvar reiterated that despite the outbreak of the Coronavirus, the company would use all its capacities to materialize the slogan of the year, "Surge in Production."



U.S. Death Toll Tops 50,000

ATLANTA (AFP) - Gyms, hair salons and tattoo parlors had a green light to reopen in the US state of Georgia on Friday as the death toll from the coronavirus pandemic soared past 50,000 in the United States.

As the southern state lifted restrictions on some businesses, President Donald Trump took to Twitter to warn that Governor Brian Kemp, a political ally, may be moving too fast. "Spas, beauty salons, tattoo parlors, & barber shops should take a little slower path," Trump tweeted early Friday. At the same time, Trump said he had told Kemp, a Republican, "to do what is right for the great people of Georgia (& USA)!"



DR Congo Police Arrest Sect Leader After Deadly Raid

KINSHASA (AFP) - The self-styled prophet of a separatist sect blamed for deadly attacks in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been arrested in a raid on his home in Kinshasa involving hundreds of security forces.

"Mission accomplished," a police tweet said, after troops stormed the home of former MP Ne Muanda Nsemi, who heads the Bundu Dia Kongo (BDK) sect, following an hours-long siege on Friday.

A police source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said several BDK members were found in the house and added that an undisclosed number of people had died in the raid.



Virus Toll Nears 200,000 as UN Pushes for Global Vaccine Effort



GENEVA (AFP) - The global coronavirus death toll approached 200,000 on Saturday as the United Nations launched an international push for a vaccine to defeat the pandemic.

Governments around the world are struggling to limit the economic devastation unleashed by the virus, which has infected nearly 2.8 million people and left half of humanity under some form of lockdown.

The scale of the pandemic has forced medical research on the virus to move at unprecedented speed, but effective treatments are still far away and the United Nations chief said the effort will require cooperation on a global scale.

"We face a global public enemy like no other," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a virtual briefing on Friday, asking for international organizations, world leaders and the private sector to join hands.

"A world free of COVID-19 requires the most massive public health effort in history."

The vaccine should be safe, affordable and available to all, Guterres stressed at the meeting, which was also attended by the leaders of Germany and France. But notably absent from the meeting were the leaders of China, where the virus first emerged late last year, and the United States, which has accused the UN's World Health Organization of not warning quickly enough about the original outbreak.

The UN chief's vaccine appeal came a day after US President Donald Trump prompted outcry and ridicule with his suggestion that disinfectants be used to treat coronavirus patients.

"Is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning?" Trump mused during a televised briefing. "It sounds interesting to me."

As experts -- and disinfectant manufacturers -- rushed to caution against any such dangerous experiment, the president tried to walk back his comments, saying he had been speaking "sarcastically."

The United States is the hardest-hit country by far in the pandemic, recording 51,017 deaths and more than 890,000 infections. The world's biggest economy has been hammered by the pandemic, with 26 million jobs lost since the crisis began, and American leaders are under pressure to find ways to ease social distancing measures.

Despite criticism from Trump, the governor of Georgia allowed some businesses, including nail salons and bowling alleys to reopen on Friday, sparking both criticism and relief.

The mayor of the state's capital Atlanta condemned the "irresponsible" move, telling ABC News: "There is nothing essential about going to a bowling alley or giving a manicure in the middle of a pandemic."

But some in the city cherished the opportunity to re-engage with society. "I actually had a great time," beamed Tili Banks, 41, as she and a friend left a bowling alley.

"I was just so happy to be out that I didn't even realize that I had these people's bowling shoes on when I walked outside."

Global COVID-19 deaths have climbed past 195,000, according to an AFP tally, but new reported cases appear to have leveled off at about 80,000 a day.

The daily death toll in Western countries seems to be falling, a sign hopeful epidemiologists had been looking for, but the WHO has warned that other nations are still in the early stages of the fight.

The unprecedented situation has left the world staring at its worst downturn since the Great Depression, and put immense pressure on world leaders to balance public health concerns and economic needs.

Brazil "Super Minister" Quits in Bolsonaro's Worst Crisis Yet

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro suffered the heaviest blow to his presidency so far as his popular justice minister quit on Friday and accused him of potentially criminal meddling in law enforcement, adding to the turmoil of a government struggling to confront a fast-growing coronavirus outbreak.

Sergio Moro, who won broad public support for jailing corrupt politicians and businessmen as a judge, said he was resigning because Bolsonaro fired federal police chief Mauricio Valeixo for personal and political reasons.

The shocking exit and allegations from the so-called 'super minister' were a hammer blow for Bolsonaro, whose popularity had already slumped for downplaying the pandemic that has killed more than 3,600 Brazilians and shows signs of worsening. Bolsonaro called Moro's accusations "baseless," denying he had interfered in investigations and insisting that he had the authority to replace federal police officials.



Trump's COVID-19 Disinfectant Ideas Horrify Health Experts

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump's musings on whether injecting disinfectants might treat COVID-19 horrified medical professionals on Friday and raised fresh concerns that his stream-of-consciousness briefings could push frightened people to poison themselves with untested treatments.

An international chorus of doctors and health experts urged people not to drink or inject disinfectant after Trump on Thursday suggested that scientists should investigate inserting the cleaning agent into the body as a way to cure COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus.

Trump on Friday sought to portray his remarks as sarcasm.

"I was asking a question sarcastically to reporters like you just to see what would happen," Trump told reporters at the White House.

His remarks during his daily media briefing on Thursday, directed at doctors in the room who serve on his coronavirus task force, did not come across as sarcasm.

Medical experts denounced Trump's suggestions and leading Democrats blasted the Republican president. "It is unfortunate that I have to comment on this, but people should under no circumstances ingest or inject bleach or disinfectant," American Medical Association President Patrice Harris said in a statement. "Rest assured when we eventually find a treatment for or vaccine against COVID-19, it will not be in the cleaning supplies aisle."

Trump said on Thursday that scientists should explore whether inserting ultraviolet light or disinfectant into the bodies of people infected with the coronavirus might help them clear the disease.

"Is there a way we can do something like that by injection, inside, or almost a cleaning?" Trump asked. "It would be interesting to check that." Pressed repeatedly about the issue on Friday, Trump said he was not encouraging people to ingest disinfectant.

Trump also has promoted an anti-malaria drug called hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 even though its effectiveness is unproven and there are concerns about heart issues. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Friday cautioned against using hydroxychloroquine in COVID-19 patients outside of hospitals and clinical trials, citing risks of serious heart rhythm problems.

Biden Predicts Trump Will Try to Postpone U.S. Election

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has predicted that U.S. President Donald Trump will try to postpone the country's November election in an attempt to win.

"Mark my words, I think he is gonna try to kick back the election somehow, come up with some rationale why it can't be held," Biden said during an online fundraiser Thursday.

The 77-year-old former vice president said it is "the only way he thinks he can possibly win."

Six months before U.S. voters head to the polls, Trump's mind is already in election mode.

But with a pandemic raging and job losses climbing to 26.4 million on Thursday, Trump's path to victory may be harder than he anticipated.

Biden, highlighting Trump's recent threat to veto emergency funding for the U.S. Post Office, claimed

it was an example of the president's intention to "do all he can to make it very hard for people to vote."

While mail-in voting and absentee ballots remain methods many say could help limit voters spreading coronavirus, Trump maintains they create the potential for fraud.

Meanwhile, dozens of U.S. states have postponed their primary races, which will officially determine who will be the presidential nominee.

The 73-year-old Trump has been criticized for turning his daily White House coronavirus briefings into campaign events -- rallying his base and taking swipes at his detractors such as Biden, who is sheltering at home.

"We have a sleepy guy in a basement of a house that the press is giving a free pass to, who doesn't want to do debates because of COVID," Trump said during the Thursday briefing.



China Sends Team Including Medical Experts to Advise On North Korea's Kim

SEOUL (Reuters) - China has dispatched a team to North Korea including medical experts to advise on North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, according to three people familiar with the situation.

The trip by the Chinese doctors and officials comes amid conflicting reports about the health of the North Korean leader. Reuters was unable to immediately determine what the trip by the Chinese team signaled in terms of Kim's health.

A delegation led by a senior member of the Chinese Communist Party's International Liaison Department left Beijing for North Korea on Thursday, two of the people said. The department is the main Chinese body dealing with neighbouring North Korea. The sources declined to be identified given the sensitivity of the matter.

The Liaison Department could not be reached by Reuters for comment late on Friday. China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment late on Friday.

Daily NK, a Seoul-based website, reported earlier this week that Kim was recovering after undergoing a cardiovascular procedure on April 12. It cited one unnamed source in North Korea. South Korean government officials and a Chinese official with the Liaison Department challenged subsequent reports suggesting that Kim was in grave danger after surgery. South Korean officials said they had detected no signs of unusual activity in North Korea.

On Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump also downplayed earlier reports that Kim was gravely ill. "I think the report was incorrect," Trump told reporters, but he declined to say if he had been in touch with North Korean officials.

On Friday, a South Korean source told Reuters their intelligence was that Kim was alive and would likely make an appearance soon. The person said he did not have any comment on Kim's current condition or any Chinese involvement. An official familiar with U.S. intelligence said that Kim was known to have health problems but they had no reason to conclude he was seriously ill or unable eventually to reappear in public.

A U.S. State department spokeswoman had no comment. U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, when asked about Kim's health on Fox News after Trump spoke said, "I don't have anything I can share with you tonight, but the American people should know we're watching the situation very keenly."





Jordan Apt (\$2000)
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J, balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Shariati Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p, S
J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Fereshteh (\$2400) 220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & F.F
Darrous (\$1900) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & F.F
Farmanieh (\$2600) 300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & F.F

Zaferanieh (\$1400)
2bdrs, S/p, S, J, F.F

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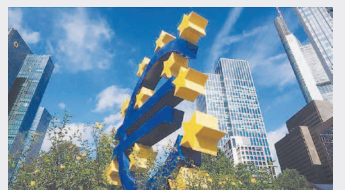
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EU Government Debt/GDP Ratio Drops to 77.8% in Q4

BRUSSELS (Dispatches)- The EU's general government debt to GDP ratio was 77.8% at the end of the last quarter of 2019, according to Eurostat data released.

The figure was down from 79.3% at the end of the second quarter of last year and 79.6% in the same quarter of 2018. The ratio was 84.1% in the eurozone in the fourth quarter of the last year, down from 85.8% in the same quarter of the previous year.

Greece remained with the highest general government debt to GDP ratio in the bloc with 176.6%, a debt of €331.1 billion (\$370.8 billion).



EU Agrees Trillion Euro Covid-19 Rescue Deal

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union leaders agreed on Thursday to build a trillion euro emergency fund to help recover from the coronavirus pandemic, avoiding another all-night bust-up but leaving divisive details until the summer.

With the EU's Brussels headquarters under lockdown - along with most of Europe - the 27 leaders held a four-hour video conference to consider proposals, rallying around a bigger common budget for 2021-27 with a recovery program.

At around 1% of the EU's economic output, the multi-year common budget has long been one of the most contentious subjects of debate for its members. Expanding it will not be easy, even if Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte hailed "great progress" after the summit ended. French President Emmanuel Macron said differences continued between EU governments over whether the fund should be transferring grant money, or simply making loans.

"Divisions remain," Macron told reporters in Paris.

"I'm saying this sincerely: if Europe raises debt to loan to others, that won't live up to the response we need," he said, adding that it would saddle already heavily-indebted countries, such as Italy, Belgium and Greece, with yet more debt.

Europe is facing a severe economic shock from the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus, which has also led to border closures across the bloc and left member states fighting over medical supplies.

European Central Bank Governor Christine Lagarde told the leaders the pandemic could cut between 5% and up to 15% of euro zone economic output, officials and diplomats said.

The euro zone's economic growth for 2020 is forecast to contract 5.4%, which would make it the worst year since the common currency was introduced in 1999, according to a Reuters poll. That is still better than the International Monetary Fund's latest forecast for a decline of 7.5%.

After weeks of squabbling, the leaders approved half-a-trillion euros worth of an immediate rescue scheme to protect jobs, businesses and offer cheap credit to governments.

But with Italy and Spain hit far harder than Germany by the crisis, old enmities have surfaced across the bloc. Reaching agreement among euro zone finance ministers two weeks ago on the smaller euro rescue scheme was torturous, as the Netherlands refused an Italian demand to issue common debt.

Conte told leaders that a recovery fund should be 1.5 trillion euros in size and provide grants to EU governments to stop countries heading towards economic collapse and thereby threatening the viability of the bloc's internal market.

"Grants are essential," Conte said, according to diplomats who were on the video conference. "The sanitary emergency has quickly become a social emergency. But now we are facing a political emergency as well." Austria's Chancellor Sebastian Kurz took the opposite view, saying on Twitter that, while Vienna was ready to show solidarity, "we should do this through loans". Kurz said he would coordinate with "like-minded countries", a reference to wealthy but cautious northern countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, who resent having to pay for poorer southern countries they see as fiscally irresponsible.

Singapore Sees Sharper Economic Slump

SINGAPORE (Dispatches)- Singapore is bracing for a sharper economic contraction this year than an earlier forecast of a slump of as much as 4%, as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread globally and disrupts supply chains.

The city-state is "very likely" to see a sharper fall in the GDP, trade and industry minister Chan Chun Sing said yesterday in an interview with Bloomberg Television's Haslinda Amin.

"We are really concerned that worldwide, this is going to lead to a more serious problem than many had anticipated just a month ago."

The minister refrained from giving a new official forecast for GDP, but noted that connectivity among the major economies has been unsettled, hurting the short term capacities and long-term capabilities of countries.

The nation's gross domestic product contracted an annualized 10.6% in the first quarter - the most in a decade -- with the government in March forecasting a contraction of 1%-4% for the year.

Singapore's equity benchmark, the Straits Times Index, dropped as much as 0.4% as of 10:59 am compared with a gain in the MSCI Asia Pacific Index, amid worries the city-state is heading for a deeper economic contraction after it extended a partial lockdown. Singapore on Tuesday extended its so-called "circuit-breaker" measures for a further four weeks until June 1 in a bid to "decisively" bring down coronavirus cases within the community.

Schools remain shut, foreign workers are now confined in their dormitories and more workplaces are closed, with only the most essential services operating. There could be some delays to projects in the shipyard and construction sector, though the city-state hopes to regain momentum once the crisis abates, Chan said.

He added the country hopes to "progressively reopen" its economy in about a month's time and said Singapore is planning "much more testings" for the entire population. Citigroup Inc economists on Tuesday warned that Singapore will witness a deeper recession because of the extended circuit breaker, with the economy now seen contracting 8.5% for the year.

Initially seen as a global model for how to contain the pandemic, Singapore now has the most cases in South-East Asia - more than 10,000 - as Covid-19 infections among foreign labourers living in densely packed dormitories have surged.

The government has committed more than S\$60bil in fiscal support and the Monetary Authority of Singapore has undertaken unprecedented easing steps to cushion the blow for businesses and households.

Chan said that Singapore's aim is to keep the fatality rate from the virus "very low," bring new daily infections in the community to single digit or the low teens as well as control the dormitories' infections by the end of the extended lockdown.



Indian Economy May Shrink Nearly 1% This Fiscal

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) -The Indian economy could contract up to 0.9% in FY21 in the worst-case scenario if the coronavirus pandemic prolongs and the government is unable to restore economic activity, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) warned on Thursday.

The lobby also urged the government to initiate structural reforms to revive the economy over the medium to long term. "In the base case, GDP growth is estimated at a negligible level of 0.6%, while in the optimistic scenario it is projected at 1.5%. In the downside risk scenario, where the pandemic outbreak gets prolonged, thereby restricting full restoration of economic activity for an extended period, GDP growth for FY 2021 could possibly contract by as much as 0.9%," CII said in a report.

It called for major structural changes such as reduction in the cost of transportation and logistics, availability of credit and reducing the cost of acquiring capital, easier norms for land acquisition, simplification of the indirect tax structure and reforms in labour laws to ease the recovery process and attract more investments after the pandemic. CII said it was time to introduce a stimulus package to deal with the immediate impact of the pandemic and provide relief to the unorganized workforce that has lost jobs due to the lockdown.

"While the short-term stimulus is urgently required to repair the economic damage, it may not be adequate to prepare the economy for a sustained recovery. A medium term plan is required to build a more competitive economy with better opportunities for trade and investment," the report further noted.

Pointing out India's debt level is not that high in comparison with major G20 countries, CII said the government has room to provide more incentives. India's fiscal stimulus so far has been small compared to many other countries, it added.

"This still allows the government to provide a sharp but temporary stimulus that can be withdrawn once the economy is back on track. Without such a step, the budget will continue to bleed for several years, as the revenue shortfall continues. At this stage, the government must do whatever it takes to tide over the crisis," the report added. In order to put the Indian economy back on track in the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic, industry lobby groups like CII and Ficci have been urging the Centre to announce a bailout package of \$200-300 billion, along with a host of other incentives for small and medium enterprises.

Italy Targets 2020 Deficit at 10.4% of GDP, Debt at 155.7%

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy is targeting its budget deficit at 10.4% of gross domestic product this year and sees the public debt rising to 155.7% of GDP,

according to a draft forecasting document obtained by Reuters.

The Economic and Financial Document (DEF), due to be approved by the cabinet on Friday, reflects the huge hit to the euro zone's third largest economy from the coronavirus epidemic.

Italy has been one of the countries hardest hit by COVID-19, registering more than 25,000 deaths, the second highest toll in the world after that of the United States.

The draft document forecasts an economic contraction of 8.0% this year under an unchanged policy scenario.

This estimate does not include the impact of a stimulus package due to be approved by the government this month, and so the growth contraction finally targeted may be somewhat smaller.

The new package will be worth some 55 billion euros (\$59.5 billion), the draft document said, confirming comments made to Reuters by a government source earlier on Thursday.

The deficit is seen falling to 5.7% of GDP next year, while the public debt is targeted to decline to 152.7%.

Italy had penciled in an automatic increase in sales tax due to kick in next January, but the draft spells out that this hike will be scrapped and not be replaced by alternative levies or spending cuts.

Instead, the government will simply forego the revenues from the tax hike, preferring to allow a higher deficit rather than risk hurting an already weakened economy.

The draft forecasts that growth will partially rebound next year, with GDP rising 4.7%.

Turkey's Industrial Goods Exports to China Start to Revive



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish industrial goods exports to China have rallied as Chinese factories resume production and businesses reopen after shutdown amid the coronavirus outbreak.

"After the Chinese economy reopened gradually, acceleration started in firms exporting to China," said Murat Kolbaşı, the chairman of the Asia-Pacific Business Council of Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK).

He recalled that life almost ground to a halt in China until the mid-March due to a large-scale lockdown to stem the spread of the virus.

"Some 75 percent of the factories restart production in China, domestic demand is now around 60-80 percent levels," Kolbaşı told Anadolu Agency.

"Turkish firms manufacturing industrial goods see a rise in export orders from China, especially in the electrical electronics industry and producing intermediate goods."

However, he said, the increase is not at the desired level yet.

Kolbaşı highlighted that Turkish industrialists also see a rebound in orders from the Asia-Pacific region. On April 8, China lifted 76-day of lockdown over Wuhan, the ground zero of the virus.

The world's second-biggest, the Chinese economy shrank 6.8 percent in the first quarter this year, according to official data last week.

The contraction was worse than expected, and the first decline since at least 1992 when official quarterly GDP records started.

The country's retail sales slumped 15.8 percent in March as shoppers deserted streets. The unemployment rate was 5.9 percent last month, after seeing highest level of 6.2 percent in February. The figure was up from 5.3 percent in January and 5.2 percent in December.

The purchasing managers' index (PMI) for the Chinese manufacturing sector rose to 52 in March from 35.7 in February, the first glimmer of the recovery.

Ersin Şahin, general manager of a Turkish diesel engine manufacturing firm Erin Motor, underlined that the automotive sector restarted production in the second half of March after slowing down in the first two months.

"Although it is below the pre-pandemic figures, for now, we expect China to be in a better position than it is today in May," Şahin said.

Half of the company's exports were with European countries and the rest were with the US and China, Şahin said.

"There has been no hitch on the US side, and we started to ship products to China as of early April."

"We are trying to make up the market loss in Europe right now."

"We are the largest exporter to China in our field across Turkey and recovery signals here became a light for the sector," he stressed.

Russia Cuts Key Interest Rate, Slashes Forecasts



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Bank of Russia on Friday cut its key interest rate by 50 basis points to 5.5% and left the door open to further reductions at future monetary policy meetings.

The move comes as the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and a historic plunge in oil prices of late pose unprecedented threats to the Russian economy.

The central bank slashed its economic forecasts, projecting that Russian GDP (gross domestic product) will decline by between 4% and 6% in 2020, recovering to grow by between 2.8% and 4.8% in 2021 and 1.5% to 3.5% in 2022.

"The dynamics of economic recovery will largely depend on the scale and effectiveness of measures taken by the Government and the Bank of Russia to mitigate the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic," the bank said in a statement Friday.

As of Friday morning, Russia had confirmed more than 65,000 cases of the coronavirus, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told CNBC earlier this week that the country, and President Vladimir Putin, faces a "very problematic" situation.

The Bank of Russia also revised its inflation forecast, projecting between 3.8% and 4.8% for 2020 with a stabilization at its 4% target in the future. In its press release Friday, the Bank of Russia said disinflationary pressure from shutdowns compensated for inflationary factors such as the fall in oil prices.

This marks Russia's seventh rate cut in the past year. Prior to holding the rate steady at 6% in March, the central bank had issued six consecutive cuts.

The dollar rose by around 0.8% against the Russian ruble following the announcement.

“The Feast of the Goat” Goes To Italy’s River Film festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short ‘The Feast of the Goat’, directed by Saeed Zamanian, has made it into the competition program of the 14th River Short Film Festival in Italy.

‘The Feast of the Goat’ will experience its 7th participation at an international film festival.

The film is about nine-year-old boy Saeed, who is trying to stop his father from sacrificing his goat. The short film received an honorable mention in the ‘Best Short fiction in Spiritual Film Section’ of the 18th Dhaka International Film Festival in Bangladesh.



World Leaders Launch WHO COVID-19 Plan, But U.S. Not Involved

GENEVA (Reuters) - Global leaders joined the World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday to launch an initiative to accelerate work on drugs, tests and vaccines against COVID-19 and to share them around the world.

French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen were among leaders taking part in a videoconference to announce the plan, but the United States stayed away.

“The world needs these tools and needs them fast,” WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said as the virtual meeting got under way. “We are facing a common threat which we can only defeat with a common approach.”

The WHO said late on Thursday it would announce a “landmark collaboration” on Friday to speed development of safe, effective drugs, tests and vaccines to prevent, diagnose and treat COVID-19, the lung disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

A spokesman for the U.S. mission in Geneva told Reuters before the meeting that the United States would not be involved.

“There will be no U.S. official participation,” he said in an email reply to a query. “We look forward to learning more about this initiative in support of international cooperation to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 as soon as possible.”

U.S. President Donald Trump has lambasted the WHO as being slow to react to the outbreak and being “China-centric”, and announced a suspension of funding to the U.N. agency.

More than 2.7 million people worldwide have been infected with COVID-19 and nearly 190,000 have died since the virus emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year, according to a Reuters tally.

More than 100 potential COVID-19 vaccines are being developed, including six already in clinical trials, said Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI vaccine alliance, a public-private partnership that leads immunisation campaigns in poor countries.

“We need to ensure that there are enough vaccines for everyone, we are going to need global leadership to identify and prioritise vaccine candidates,” he told a separate Geneva news briefing, before taking part in the formal WHO announcement.



Global manufacturing capacity must be ramped up ahead of choosing “a winner” vaccine, Berkley said, noting that GAVI and the World Bank were both looking at the issue.

–“We can’t have a repeat of what happened in 2009 - the H1N1 vaccine, when there was not enough supply for developing countries or when supply did come it came much later.” Another important question was how well a vaccine would work in people most at risk from COVID-19, Berkley said.

“How well do they work in the elderly, are they single or multiple dose etc.?” he said, noting that older people had weaker immune systems.

OPEC’s No.3 Already Started Cutting Oil Supply



KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) - Although the new OPEC+ agreement goes into effect on May 1, OPEC’s fourth-largest producer, Kuwait, has already started to reduce crude oil supply to international markets “sensing a responsibility responding to market conditions,” Kuwait’s Oil Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel told the official state Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Thursday.

OPEC and its non-OPEC partners led by Russia agreed earlier this month to reduce their combined oil production by 9.7 million bpd in May and June, in response to the crash in global oil demand in the pandemic. Analysts, however, think that those cuts would be ‘too little too late’ to support the market, considering that the current demand loss stands at around 30 million bpd—three times the cuts promised by OPEC.

Kuwait is OPEC’s fourth-largest producer behind Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and it pumped 2.84 million bpd of oil in March, up by 170,000 bpd from February, according to OPEC’s secondary sources in its latest Monthly Oil Market Report (MOMR). Kuwait, like its allies in the Persian Gulf, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, opened the taps in March after early in the month Russia refused to back a 1.5-million-bpd collective OPEC+ cut to address the lower demand.

But after the OPEC+ group managed to hammer out a new deal earlier in April, Kuwait now says that it had started to reduce supply to the market, and called for “maintaining spirit of team work to face forthcoming challenges emanating from the coronavirus impact on the global oil demand.”

While Kuwait signals reductions in supply ahead of schedule, Saudi Arabia declined to comment for Bloomberg if it would cut supply before May, while UAE energy officials were not immediately available for comments. Iraq, however, a regular cheater in OPEC+ agreements, is not planning on reducing production before the start of the new deal, Alaa Al-Yasiri, acting director general of the state-run Oil Marketing Co, told Bloomberg.

Venezuela’s Oil Output Could Fall Again Soon

LONDON (Oil Price)- On Tuesday, the Trump administration told the last remaining American oil companies in Venezuela that they had until December to wind down operations in the country.

The Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued a new license that only authorizes “limited maintenance of essential operations” in Venezuela, with a wind down period ending on December 1. Companies affected include Chevron, Halliburton, Schlumberger, Baker Hughes and Weatherford International.

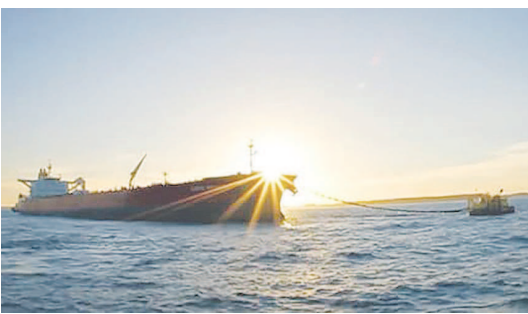
Essentially, the companies can continue very limited operations in Venezuela but will not be able to export oil. They can only do the bare minimal to comply with contracts, but drilling and exporting are barred. Operations will have to end on December 1.

The U.S. government slapped harsh sanctions on Venezuela a year and a half ago when it launched its regime change campaign, seeking to oust President Nicolas Maduro. Washington aimed to block most of Venezuelan oil exports as a way of strangling the country. But a handful of American oil companies, including Chevron, were repeatedly issued three-month waivers.

The Trump administration thought that they could topple Maduro in short order, and they wanted American oil giants there to operate in a post-Maduro environment. Venezuela’s oil laws would be rewritten to allow for private international companies to come in.

But ousting Maduro has proved much more difficult than Trump’s team thought. As Chevron’s three-month waivers approached expiration, the U.S. government repeatedly weighed the pros and cons of extending. Hardliners, such as former national security adviser John Bolton, wanted to let them expire and force out the companies as a way of tightening the screws on Maduro. Others in Trump’s orbit, warned that doing so would mean losing an American presence in Venezuela while also gifting those assets to Russia and China. The latter view won out.

The same calculus was at play in regards to Tuesday’s



decision, although Trump is now leaning more towards forcing the companies out. But not entirely.

“In our view, this may reflect a continuing Trump Administration intent to retain a U.S. footprint for a ‘day one after Maduro’ scenario,” ClearView Energy Partners wrote in a note to clients. The Trump administration “also

appears to be trying to prevent Maduro from earning revenue from the companies’ operations while blocking him from taking over their assets.”

But the new license does not call for Chevron and others to pack up and get out immediately. The directive limits Chevron’s operations in Venezuela while attempting to maintain the company’s footprint in the country so that Russia and China do not step into the void, ClearView argues. The Trump administration may also be allowing some leeway for Chevron to operate in order to prevent being nationalized by the Venezuelan government.

At the same time, the December deadline does not guarantee a complete end of Chevron’s operations in Venezuela. ClearView argues that the decision may have had the U.S. presidential election in mind – anti-Maduro sentiment is strong in Florida, an important swing state. By promising to end oil operations for American companies in Venezuela, Trump may be aiming to “avoid unflattering optics,” ClearView said in its report. Trump is signaling escalation with Venezuela to ensure support from anti-Maduro voters in Florida, while also not going so far as to force out Chevron, at least for now.

It’s not clear if the U.S. government will be able to walk the tightrope successfully. Venezuela has been in dire straights for quite some time, but is now suffering from multiple crises at once. The economy has been in shambles for years, made worse by U.S. sanctions, but a public health crisis from the coronavirus pandemic and the worldwide collapse in oil prices dramatically increases the pain.

Venezuela’s oil production fell to 670,000 bpd in March, down by a third since the U.S. imposed sanctions at the start of 2019.

Indecisive EU to Force ECB Into More Emergency Action

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - After another disappointing EU summit, the European Central Bank finds itself in a familiar position as the leading savior of the euro, once again being called upon to push out its boundaries while politicians bicker.

European Union leaders agreed overnight to build a 1 trillion euro emergency fund to support recovery from the coronavirus crisis that has shattered the bloc’s economies — a big step given previous discord over burden-sharing.

But with scant detail given and deep divisions between them, especially over mutualising debt, final decisions could take months. Even then, the package is a mere 1% of the 19-country euro zone’s GDP, a relatively small sum given forecasts of a 5-15% drop in output and double-digit unemployment.

And unlike its counterparts in the United States, Japan and Britain, all helped by coordinated budget policies as they try to save their economies from the biggest downturn since the Great Depression, the ECB is fighting largely alone.

“Barring a more ambitious deal, the ECB is likely to remain the only game in town

as far as peripheral spreads are concerned,” Pictet Wealth Management Strategics Frederik Ducroz said, referring to the yield differential between Italian and German bonds, a measure of perceived risk.

To buy governments time, the ECB will have to expand stimulus again, twisting and bending the rules of central banking even further and opening the door wider to political and legal challengers who say it is overstepping its mandate.

It’s a well-rehearsed scene: Faced with an emergency, the ECB takes bold steps to give politicians the room to follow. But thinking the central bank has their backs covered, leaders become complacent, forcing the ECB to act again and furthering the perception that it is the only serious player in town.

But this repeated cycle may be fuelling doubts about Europe’s solidarity and commitment to the euro. The spread between Italian and German debt is rising steadily even while the ECB hoovers up billions of euros worth of bonds each day, as investors sceptical about the viability of Rome’s finances raise their bets on an eventual restructuring.

Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei, emphasized, “It is good that during the holy month of Ramadan, a large-scale maneuver is formed to provide financial assistance, empathy, and pious help to the needy and the poor people.”

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar that is observed by Muslims worldwide. While fasting from dawn until sunset, Muslims abstain from eating and drinking. Moon sighting is carried in Iran by the Office of Islamic Revolution Leader prior to the fasting month to declare the beginning of the holy month.

The month lasts 29 or 30 days based on the visual sightings of the crescent moon. Eid Al-Fitr marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

As the Coronavirus outbreak put restrictions on all social interactions, this year, holy Ramadan’s mass ceremonies such as Iftar or Quran recitation, and mass prayers at holy sites have given way to individual prayers and worship at home.

Meanwhile, Iranians fast according to the principles of health guidelines regarding the Coronavirus and hold religious rites individually to celebrate this holy, blessed month. Iran started month of Ramadhan as of yesterday.

President Says...

FROM PAGE 1

He also noted that a large number of coronavirus cases in Iran have been treated with outpatient treatment services following an increase in the number of laboratories, lab testing with quick results, and the efforts made by the health personnel.

Under a coordinated management system covering all sectors and organizations, the officials have been deployed to the infected provinces and cities in a timely manner, have prevented a peak in the coronavirus outbreak, and have rapidly created stable situation by enforcing precautionary measures and restrictions, the president noted.

President Rouhani also explained that Iran is taking the path to controlling the disease, but cautioned that any reduction in the level of warnings and popular vigilance could result in another peak.

He once again called on people to stay home, not go out for unnecessary activities, and help the officials ensure a stable and reliable situation in containing COVID-19.

President Rouhani finally noted that the committees of the Coronavirus Fight National Headquarters have been assigned to evaluate the process of resumption of activities in every city and define the necessary health protocols by assessing the statistics for the infected cases, deaths and the outbreak indices.

Serica Says...

FROM PAGE 1

Serica also confirmed its Columbus condensate development had been set back by a delay to Shell’s Shearwater infrastructure development, to which Columbus would be connected.

Shearwater is now expected on stream next year rather than this year, reflecting spending cutbacks by the Anglo-Dutch major, and Serica therefore expects Columbus to start producing in the second half of 2021. Columbus is expected to produce 8,000 boe/d.

Serica increased its overall oil and gas production by 18% last year to 30,000 boe/d. With no debt, and operating costs reduced to \$12.60/boe of production last year, the company was in a “strong position to weather” market turbulence related to coronavirus and the oil price crash, it said.

Saudi Arabia...

FROM PAGE 1

Wahhabism is the radical ideology dominating Saudi Arabia, freely preached by regime-backed clerics there, and inspiring militant outfits such as al-Qaeda.

The al-Qaeda terrorists used abandoned homes in Jawf to stock weapons, make bombs and train militants, according to the report.

“By early 2020, AQAP had a sizable real estate portfolio in al-Jawf and Marib and ran most of the provinces’ large businesses. Sprawling villages in al-Jawf, the second largest governorate in Yemen, turned into strongholds of the organization after residents were forced to flee to other areas. AQAP turned some of the abandoned homes into factories used to manufacture explosive belts, IEDs and car bombs. Others were used to stock weapons, train militants,” it said.

Recently, the Yemeni armed forces managed to liberate Jawf after retaking the province’s Niham district in a battle that left 2,000 Saudi-backed elements, including terrorists of al-Qaeda and Daesh, dead or captured.

“By March, the Yemeni army had successfully subdued Niham and advanced all the way to al-Jawf and Ma’rib. Now, for the first time in nearly 55 years, al-Jawf and most of Marib Province is under Yemeni control following decades of de facto rule by Riyadh through its various Yemeni proxies,” the report said.

With the liberation of Jawf, it added, Saudi-sponsored mercenaries left behind weapons and unexploded ordnances, with the remnants of cluster bombs still embedded in the ground.

“In their haste to escape the coming onslaught, Saudi forces left behind a slew of both medium and heavy weapons as well as the ammunition required to make them come to life. Whole stores of weapons, unexploded ordnance, and mines were abandoned, often amidst the tattered flags of Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda and in huge tunnels reminiscent of those left behind in the wake of the wars in Syria and Iraq,” the report said.

French Open Now Eyeing September 27 Start

PARIS (Dispatches) - The organizers of the French Open, who were criticized for unilaterally moving the tournament to a September start without consulting other tennis federations, could delay the event by another week, a report said Friday.

The claycourt Grand Slam could now start on September 27 instead of September 20, preceded by a week of qualification matches, Le Parisien newspaper said.

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Tendulkar's 'Desert Storm' Voted His Top ODI Innings

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - A blistering 143 scored against Australia in 1998 was voted Sachin Tendulkar's greatest one-day innings in an International Cricket Council poll released for his 47th birthday.

The 131-ball knock, with nine fours and five sixes, became known as the 'Desert Storm' after a sand storm in Sharjah interrupted India's chase. Tendulkar took on the likes of Shane Warne, Damien Fleming and Michael Kasprovicz but his side lost.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SUNDAY APRIL 26, 2020

China Signals World Cup Ambitions With New Football Stadiums

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China is in the throes of a multibillion-dollar splurge on new football stadiums, ramping up ambitions to be a superpower in the sport and host a World Cup as early as 2030.

The building spree is taking place despite the coronavirus pandemic which has brought much of the world to a standstill, ravaging economies and putting live sport on hold.

But with the outbreak receding in China, where it emerged in December, Chinese Super League (CSL) champions Guangzhou Evergrande last week began construction on their 12 billion yuan (\$1.7 billion) new home.

With a capacity of 100,000, the lotus flower-shaped stadium will for a time trump Barcelona's Camp Nou -- which is set for expansion -- as the world's biggest football arena, once it is completed by the end of 2022.

Evergrande Group, a major property developer founded by one of China's richest men, said it also intends to build two more 80,000-seater stadiums in China.

The country will have at least 12 major new football stadiums two years from now, said the state-run Southern Metropolis Daily, calling it "a new era for Chinese football".

Most will be used for the newly expanded 2021 Club World Cup and the 2023 AFC Asian Cup, but President Xi Jinping has his eyes on the biggest prize of all.

"I think China's desire to apply for the World Cup is very clear," said Ji Yuyang, a journalist for the Oriental Sports Daily.

Ji said it was a matter of when, not if, China bids.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in June that he would welcome a Chinese bid to stage the 2030 World Cup, the next one up for grabs.

Guangzhou Evergrande's new stadium made headlines because of its vast scale and bold design. But it jarred because most sport in the world is shut down and economies, including China's -- the second largest -- are reeling from coronavirus.

Moreover, Guangzhou is not holding Asian Cup games and the stadium will not be ready for the Club World Cup, even though the tournament is poised to be put back from the summer of 2021 because of the pandemic.

Critics also queried why a club that averages about 50,000 for home matches needs such a big arena.

"I think Evergrande may have two considerations. First, a 100,000-seat stadium might come in handy if China hosts a World Cup final or opening ceremony," said Ji. "Another point is that Evergrande will be able to make a statement by saying that they have the largest professional football stadium in the world, with the largest number of spectators."

Brown Wants to Win Title on the Pitch

LONDON (Dispatches) - Celtic captain Scott Brown insists he does not want the Scottish season to be declared over, even if it means the Glasgow giants sealing a record-equalling ninth consecutive title.

UEFA is committed to leagues being completed, but on Thursday opened the door to shutting down the seasons based on government advice that it is not safe to resume games or if it would cause irreparable financial damage.

The Scottish Professional Football Leagues (SPFL) have already passed a controversial resolution that has brought the three divisions below the Premiership to an end with standings based on points-per-game and allows the SPFL board to do the same to the top flight.

Celtic sat 13 points clear of second-placed Rangers, who had a game in hand, when the season was brought to a sudden halt last month by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Obviously our preference is to play the games because we want finish the season," Brown told Sky Sports.

"We want the season to finish so we can play out all the games and we can get the trophy. "We think that if we continue playing the way we were playing, we could extend our lead at the top."

Rangers have joined Aberdeen in supporting proposals for the season to be completed behind closed doors. "Rangers have consistently called for the 2019/2020 season to be played to a finish," a club spokesperson told Sky.

German Cup Final Postponed

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The German BFA announced Friday that the national cup final, planned for May 23 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium, has been postponed, but said it hopes it can still take place this season behind closed doors.

The semi-finals of the Cup, which had been scheduled for this week, were postponed when the season was halted in mid March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Holders Bayern Munich, Bayer Leverkusen, Eintracht Frankfurt and fourth division side FC Saarbrücken had all reached the last four.



Most stadiums currently used by Chinese football teams were built for multiple sports. They are falling into disrepair and facilities for fans are poor.

Replacing them with gleaming, football-specific arenas fits with Xi's master plan to transform the sport in the country on and off the pitch.

In Shanghai, which has ambitions of holding the Olympics, a 33,000-seat stadium for CSL side Shanghai SIPG is scheduled to be finished next year.

Shanghai Stadium, the biggest arena in the city and SIPG's former home, is also undergoing major renovation.

Ji said that while the Evergrande Group were likely paying for Guangzhou's new stadium, in some other instances it was a combination of the club and local government.

Professor Simon Chadwick said that aside from China's World Cup aspirations, the rush on new stadiums sends a message that "China is developing and becoming healthier and stronger."

"There's something about the iconography and symbolism of the stadiums, particularly the Guangzhou development," said Chadwick, director of the Centre for the Eurasian Sport Industry at Emlyon Business School. "This is a huge stadium, incredibly striking design, pictures of it have been carried across the world and people are commenting on it across the world."

"It's almost the soft power of stadiums. China is trying to use these hugely distinctive stadium designs as a way of attracting people and attention, of getting people to understand that China wants the same things that other countries want."



Bale Urges Not to Rush to Restart La Liga

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid star Gareth Bale says there should be no rush to restart La Liga during the coronavirus lockdown as the Spanish football federation plans tests and a return to training.

Testing players is being discussed with a view to completing the Liga season and thereby avoiding financial disaster, a source close to La Liga told AFP.

Bale said he wanted to get back into action but felt it wise to wait and see.

"Everyone wants to play football, but the most important thing is everyone stays safe, we don't want to come back too early. We need to make sure everything is done safely so we avoid the second wave of this virus," Bale told British broadcaster BT Sports. The Bundesliga in Germany, where there have been far fewer coronavirus deaths, said on Thursday they are "ready" to restart on May 9 but needed government approval.

Rafael Ramos of the Spanish Association of Football Team Physicians said La Liga is planning to return to action in a series of stages.

"The idea according to La Liga is to test everyone on April 28 and 29," Ramos said on Spanish radio on Thursday.

He added that the tests would be repeated every three or four days.

La Liga president Javier Tebas said several alternatives for a return to action were being mulled with May 4 slated for the return to training.

"The scenarios we are looking at could see La Liga restart as early as 28-29 May, but could also be 6-7 June or even as late as June 28," Tebas said, calculating that the move could save Spanish clubs a billion euros in revenue if they complete La Liga and the European competitions.

FIFA to Give Members \$150m of Virus Relief Funds

ZURICH (Dispatches) - FIFA will release \$150 million (139 million euros) to its member football associations to help handle financial troubles caused by the coronavirus, the global governing body said on Friday.

FIFA said that "all operational funding" for 2019 and 2020 would be distributed amongst the 211 member associations in the next few days "as the first step of a relief plan to assist the football community impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic".

Each national governing body will receive \$500,000, that FIFA says would normally be delivered "upon fulfillment of specific criteria", but will release those funds and any "remaining entitlement for 2019 and 2020".

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said that the funds were the "first step of a far-reaching financial relief plan we are developing to respond to the emergency across the whole football community". "It is FIFA's duty to be there and support the ones that are facing acute needs," added Infantino. "This starts by providing immediate financial assistance to our member associations, many of which are experiencing severe financial distress."

The funds come from the Forward 2.0 program, which was launched in 2016 and will provide \$1.746 billion (around 1.6 billion euros) in total over the 2019-2022 period.



Dutch League Becomes First in Europe to End Season

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - The Dutch football federation (KNVB) called an end to the 2019-20 season on Friday, as the Eredivisie became the first top European league called off due to the coronavirus pandemic.

No team will be declared champions after Ajax and AZ Alkmaar were left level on points at the top of the table with nine games still to play.

"Unfortunately, given the measures (banning large-scale gatherings) taken by the government, it became impossible to finish the 2019-2020 season," the KNVB said in a statement.

"Public health always comes first. It's not just a football problem here given what the coronavirus is doing to society. Nonetheless, the professional football committee is aware that today's decisions are going to cause great disappointment for some," it added.

Leaders Ajax, above AZ on goal difference, will qualify for next season's Champions League, according to the KNVB, which will await a definitive verdict from UEFA on May 25.

AZ will likely enter the competition's preliminary rounds, with Feyenoord, PSV Eindhoven and Willem II set to compete in the Europa League based on the final standings.

It marks the first time since 1945 the Dutch season has finished without a league champion.

