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Iranian Regions Categorized Based On Coronavirus Threat

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's National Coronavirus Headquarters has decided to put all areas of the country into three categories based on the COVID-19 outbreak and the threat of spread of the disease, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says.

Addressing a Sunday session of the National Coronavirus Headquarters in Tehran, President Rouhani said a plan has been ratified to categorize various regions of the country as "white, yellow and red zones" based on the threat posed by COVID-19.

The president said each region will fall into one of those three categories on the basis of the coronavirus morbidity rate, the extent of outbreak, and the regulations introduced by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

Various restrictions and regulations relating to the coronavirus outbreak will apply to each of the three zones, the president added.

More than 100 cities would fall into the white zone category, he noted, saying as long as a region remains in the white zone, the religious sites could reopen in that area and the congregational prayers and Friday prayers could be held in there. **See Page 7**

Death Toll of COVID-19 Sharply Declining in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN- Head of Public Relations and Information Center of the Ministry of Health announced that so far, 90,481 people in the country have definitely been infected with the Coronavirus, 5,710 people have died due to the virus and 69,657 of total infected people have recovered.

Kianoush Jahanpour about the latest data on the deadly coronavirus in the country and the deaths caused by the virus said, "According to the definitive laboratory findings and from yesterday to April 26 in the country, 1,153 new patients with COVID-19 were diagnosed in the country and the number of patients with this disease reached 90,481." Fortunately, 69,657 patients have recovered and have been discharged so far," Jahanpour added.

The head of the Ministry of Public Relations Center said, "Unfortunately, in the past 24 hours, 60, COVID-19 patients have lost their lives, and 5,710 people have lost their lives in the country to date." **See Page 7**

Leader Urges Nation Not to Be Afraid of U.S., Bullying Powers



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has calls on the Iranian people not to be afraid of the United States and other bullying powers.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Saturday after taking part in a Qur'an recitation event to mark the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. The Leader attended the event via videoconference in line with guidelines to avoid gatherings to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"Fear of the U.S. will result in bitter outcomes and we have witnessed in previous years that some of our statesmen's fear of the U.S. caused difficult problems for them," the Leader stated.

The Leader urged fearlessness and steadfastness in the face of enemies and said some Muslim states have suffered humiliation as a result of disregarding their own might and being intimidated by tyrannical powers.

Ayatollah Khamenei congratulated the advent of the holy month of Ramadan and called on Muslims to act upon the teachings of the holy Qur'an that could save all humanity.

The Leader added that Qur'an has guidelines for resolving the problems of human beings and stated that some verses of the holy book teach people social relations that they need in their lives.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that obeying the practical guidelines of Qur'an is the only way to save humanity from cruelty, discrimination, war, insecurity, depression of values and to establish security, health and welfare.

The holy Qur'an instructed human beings to use their wealth and power for the development of other humans' lives and help the needy people, the Leader stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized that the holy Qur'an teaches Muslims not to trust despots at all.

During the ceremony, a number of reciters read out verses of the holy Qur'an in their melodious voices.

In a statement on Friday, the Leader's office declared Saturday, April 25, as the first day of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan.

The beginning of the most sacred month of the Islamic calendar comes as Muslims across the world are battling the coronavirus pandemic. Measures to contain the spread of the virus will prevent many Muslims from breaking their daylong fast in large masses as they normally do.

Virus Slump to Slash Iran Petchem Revenues by Nearly a Third

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A report by the Iranian parliament says that government revenues from exports of petrochemical products could decrease by around a third as a result of a coronavirus pandemic that has badly hit the demand side in the international markets.

The Iranian Parliament's Research Center (IPRC) said in its Saturday report that petchem revenues would fall by at least 30 percent in the current calendar year which started in late March compared to the year before.

The report said a main reason for the slump would be the depressed prices in the international oil markets as well as problems with transportation of goods across the borders and on the sea.

It said revenues derived from the sale of petrochemicals have been a main component of Iran's foreign currency income since the United States imposed its sanctions on the country's direct export of crude in November 2018.

"Given the current circumstances, there must be a proper planning to manage the impacts and consequences of the drop in foreign currency revenues derived from the export of petrochemicals," it said.

Government estimates suggest Iran's petrochemicals sector is generating around \$12 billion per year in export revenues.

The government had estimated that total revenues from the sector, including the domestic sale, would reach \$25 billion by 2021.

Output was also planned to increase to 100 million metric tons per year with the completion of 27 petrochemical projects across Iran in the next two years.

The IPRC said that the slump in demand would directly affect Iran's sale of methanol, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and aromatics. It said demand for other products like various polymers, urea and ammonia would gradually decrease over the next months.

It said, however, that Iranian refineries that produce raw materials for disinfectants and other items needed to fight the new coronavirus may feel less of the heat.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

April 25, 1980: Nightmare of Tabas

1980 was a year filled with bittersweet memories for the Islamic Revolution of Iran. It was the year that the Sacred Defense and Iraqi-imposed war broke out. It was the year of sand storm in Tabas Desert in South Khorasan Province. It was the year one could see God's hand behind the victory of Iranian nation. One of the most important, decisive and unforgettable days in the history of Islamic Iran was the day which was created by the U.S. President Jimmy Carter in Tabas Desert in support of owners of wealth and force and it became a turning point in the history and Americans have not yet taken a lesson from that event and despite witnessing the Almighty God's support from the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

On this great day, Almighty God once again helped revolutionary Iranian nation and caused wind and sand storm to blow a heavy defeat on His enemies, and the greatness of that God's miracle has not been yet wiped out of minds friends and foes. Sands and winds, which emerged for the victory of the newly-established Islamic system, branded the forehead of the Great Satan with sign of humiliation because Allah in the Holy Quran in verse 7 of chapter Muhammad says, "if you support Allah, He will support you and plant firmly your feet," and His promise is infrangible. God once again showed the people Am al-Fil (year of the elephant). He humiliated gravel of the Satan and they fled empty handed with suffering heavy losses and leaving several of their dead bodies in Tabas.

On those days, media outlets had quoted the U.S. military commanders as saying, "Only we were and the storm and Iranians were unaware of what was happening but all ended in favor of them." On April 24, 1980, six aircrafts and eight copters of the U.S. forces entered Iran's air space to start an operation, known as Operation Eagle Claw, for airlifting 53 American hostages. According to the media reports, during the operation and upon entering Iran's air space, one of the U.S. copters encountered a technical failure 120 kms off Ravar in Kerman Province and was forced to land and their crew were transferred to another copter but this copter also faced technical problem and their crew were forced to return to the U.S. aircraft carrier. Six aircrafts and six copters succeeded in getting to Tabas and in the darkness of the night landed in a remote area without being noticed by Iranian military forces. During refueling, another U.S. copter broke down and before the operation began, the U.S. forces had lost three copters. **See Page 7**

Iran Approves Import of 3m Tons of Wheat

DUBAI (Reuters) - Iran's government granted permission for the import of 3 million tons of wheat in January, media reported late on Saturday.

Of the total quantity, 1.6 million tons have been unloaded at ports and another 400,000 tons have arrived and are ready for unloading, Iran's English language daily Financial Tribune reported, quoting the director general of the Government Trading Corporation's Commercial Services Department.

The remaining 1 million tons will be imported by May 20, Hassan Nejad-Fallah was quoted as saying.

President Hassan Rouhani said last week that Iran's farming sector was not hit by the coronavirus outbreak and that Iranians need not worry about food supply as grain production was enough to cover local needs until March 2021.

The origin of these latest wheat imports and suppliers was not mentioned in the reports. Iran's wheat production is forecast at 14 million tons this Iranian year ending March 2021 with the government looking at state purchases of 10.5 million tons, Esmail Esfandiarpour, an adviser to the agriculture minister was quoted as saying by Iran's Mehr news agency.

Food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies including animal feed are exempt from U.S. sanctions reimposed in 2018.

Iranian authorities say the sanctions have nevertheless deterred some foreign banks from doing any Iranian business, including funding deals such as food shipments.

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Zarif Reviews Regional Developments With Oman, Iraq

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in phone calls with his Omani and Iraqi counterparts discussed the latest political developments in the region.

In his phone conversations with Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah and Iraq top diplomat Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Zarif exchanged views over bilateral relations and fighting coronavirus pandemic as well.

Zarif congratulated counterparts over the arrival of the Holy month of Ramadan.

Iran Starts Exporting Medical Supplies for Coronavirus Battle

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani has highlighted the country's success in dealing with the novel coronavirus outbreak, saying the Islamic Republic has begun to export the health supplies necessary for the fight against COVID-19 after meeting the domestic demand.

Addressing a meeting with economic activists from the Iranian private sector on Saturday evening, President Rouhani said the Islamic Republic has successfully coped with the coronavirus pandemic.

Commending all Iranians for joining hands in the fight against the contagious disease, President Rouhani said the administration, the private sector, the non-governmental public sector, the Armed Forces, the knowledge-based companies, and the medical society have all played a role in the national efforts to contain the coronavirus.

Paying special tribute to the Iranian medical personnel for their devotion to duty, the president said, "They (health staff) are doing a great job today. This is not an easy job. This is an outstanding and great job when you see that the bulk of people admitted to the hospital are being discharged in good health, thank God."

Highlighting Iran's major progress in the production of health supplies over the past two months, President Rouhani said the administration has not only fulfilled the domestic needs for medical items and disinfectants, but can even export those products.



"The administration has permitted the Minister of Industry to allow the plants with overproduction to export (their output)," President Rouhani noted.

Iran has achieved such great success in coping with the local demand for medical supplies that it is going to export the coronavirus diagnostic test kits in future, he noted.

The president also lauded the production of medical ventilators, computerized tomography (CT) scan devices, N95 masks and disinfectants by the domestic knowledge-based companies as a remarkable job, saying such breakthrough has been achieved through the efforts of local companies, private sectors, administrative organizations and banks.

Stressing the need for closer interaction between the state-run and private sectors, President Rouhani said the social distancing scheme is targeted only at the battle with the coronavirus.

"In light of closer contacts among the banks, the private sector and the stock market, we will be able to make a great move in the economic arena," the president underscored.

Tehran Condemns Expansion of Israeli Settlements



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a statement on Sunday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi categorically condemned the Zionist regime's recent moves to expand the settlements and annex parts of the West Bank to the territories occupied in 1948.

Mousavi described the annexation as a violation of the international law and a part of the shameful plan proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump, known as deal of the century.

The Iranian spokesperson said such illegal measures violate the international law and threaten regional peace and security, and called on the United Nations and the other international circles to act against such moves within the framework of their duties and responsibilities.

Mousavi also deplored the Zionist regime's abuse of the current circumstances in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, adding, "Alongside the battle with coronavirus, the oppressed people of Palestine are struggling against other viruses such as occupation, blockade and sanctions."

The Iranian diplomat further asked the international organizations and assemblies and the world countries to help the Palestinian people and not allow the oppressed people of Palestine to be displaced from their homes once again.

The Palestinian territories belong to the Palestinian people, Mousavi underlined, noting, "The Zionist regime is a usurper and occupier regime, and the only solution to the Palestinian crisis is holding a referendum among the main inhabitants of that territory and formation of an independent Palestinian government with Bait al-Muqaddas as its capital."

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1.

The decision has drawn condemnation from the United Nations and the European.

The UN's special Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov said on Thursday that such a move would be a "devastating blow" to the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the EU said annexing Palestinian territory "would constitute a serious violation of international law".

Tehran, Caracas Exchange Experience, Info on Fight Against COVID-19

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran and Venezuela have discussed their latest information and experiences regarding the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting was held via video conference by representatives of health ministries of both countries, namely Mohsen Assadi Lari, the director general for international cooperation at the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education, and Maria Gabriela Miquilareno, the Venezuelan deputy health minister.

Their discussions followed a phone call between the presidents of both countries where they the two sides said they would share experiences in tackling the disease.

The representatives of the two countries' health ministries exchanged information on the fight against the coronavirus and how to stem the spread of the disease.

They also discussed measures adopted to cushion the blow from U.S. sanctions.

In the discussions, the Iranian representative explained Iran's handling of the epidemic nationwide in accordance with measures adopted by the National Coronavirus Headquarters and its committees, including the launching of diagnostic laboratories, the national campaign against coronavirus, the smart social distancing plan, the launching of certain applications, etc.

Among other measures adopted are drawing up plans to tap into volunteer popular forces' potential, distribution of basic supplies, offering support aid to the needy, production of coronavirus diagnosis kits and protective gear, conducting clinical tests for the production of medicines and introducing several treatment methods, namely those using plasma and stem cells.

The Venezuelan official, in turn, expressed her country's willingness to draw on Iran's experience in containing the spread of the coronavirus.

She touched upon Iran's achievements in fighting the coronavirus, including the establishment and equipment of numerous laboratories, implementation of the screening program, and the launching of a virtual training centre.

Also attending the discussions were several other top health official who made comments on Iran's successful measures in containing the disease.

Priority Is Given to Small, Job-Creating Production Units

TEHRAN (IP)- Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli says, "The country's economic priority this year is small and job-creating production units."

On the sideline of the Economic and Coronavirus management headquarters meeting in Tehran, the Iranian Interior Minister Rahmani Fazli said, "Today, we announced the surge in production policies to the two provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan and Fars in the form of large-scale policies prepared by the government."

He added, "Iran faced the problem of sanctions last year, but this year, in addition to sanctions, two other issues have been added. One is the Corona and the other one is the global recession, which has brought the oil price below ten dollars, and our economy is affected this year. We will try to reduce its effects inside."

He pointed out that the slogan of the surge in production was raised by the Leader and added: "To do this, we need capital, and this capital can be provided from the capital market and the people."

The interior minister added that the government

should provide the people with a way to participate in both the provision of resources and investment. This is the order given by the government, and we talked to the governors about it. Another issue that can be effective in this situation is increasing productivity. We must work to increase productivity.

Regarding priorities, he said, "Our priorities are first to maintain production conditions and second, to activate industrial units and workshops damaged by Corona and eliminate unemployment."

He also pointed to the need for new investments and added, given the issue of unemployment.

The minister referred to the detrimental impacts of the virus on trade, production, economic growth, social and security of all countries around the world, hoped to find medicine and vaccine to curb the virus soon.

Pointing to the inhumane U.S. sanctions, Rahmani Fazli noted how the sanctions and the coronavirus, as well as the slump in crude oil prices, have impacted the country's economy, urged the government to make the most of the country's facilities.

IRGC Ground Force to Get Fotros Drone

TEHRAN (Tasnim)- Commander of the IRGC Ground Force's Drone Division Colonel Akbar Karimloo said his forces will be receiving the Fotros drone from the Defense Ministry in the near future.

Following extensive meetings with the Defense Ministry and evaluation of features of the homegrown drone, the IRGC Ground Force's Drone Division has decided to utilize Fotros in operational zones, he added.

The commander also noted that employment of Mohajer-6, another advanced drone manufactured by the Defense Ministry, has greatly enhanced the IRGC Ground Force's capabilities in patrol missions and combat operations along northwestern and southeastern borders.

Iran Takes Delivery of 4th Medical Shipment From Germany

TEHRAN (ILNA)- Iran received 4th consignment of its medical purchases from Germany, Managing Director of Bazargan Customs Office in the northwest of the country said.

The consignment arrived in Iran through Sari Su border market on Iran-Turkey borderline.

Sadeq Namdar said the consignment weighing 20,763 kg was imported through Sari Su border market upon the agreement between Iranian and Turkish border officials.

He added that the consignment was sent to Tehran after approval, delivery, and accomplishment of customs formalities.

The consignment which was carried by two trucks included pharmaceutical items, he noted.

Namdar went on to say that the shipment was worth about 250,000 euros.

The first consignment purchased from Germany weighing 26 tons was delivered to Iran 23 days ago.

UN Chief Hails Iran's Efforts For Yemen Ceasefire

TEHRAN (IFP) - Secretary-General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres has commended the Islamic Republic of Iran for its contribution to a ceasefire in Yemen.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday held his third telephone conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif over the past two weeks.

In the conversation, the UN chief welcomed the Islamic Republic of Iran's efforts to ensure a ceasefire in Yemen and launch political talks over the Yemeni crisis.

Guterres and Foreign Minister Zarif also emphasized the need for the reopening and security of the border and ports in Yemen to deliver humanitarian aid to the Yemeni people, particularly at the time of the outbreak of coronavirus.

Tehran Mayor Invited to Join UN Anti-COVID19 Campaign

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme Maimunah Mohd Sharif invited Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi to attend anti-coronavirus campaign.

According to public relations and international affairs department of Tehran Municipality, Hanachi is invited to present his successful experiences in fighting COVID-19.

The campaign has been started to support and to do emergency activities in fighting coronavirus and is supposed to present a roadmap for doing integrated, scientific and practical activities in line with taking care of citizens of the world cities, especially those in vulnerable areas.

Earlier in a video call with his British counterpart, Hanachi said at the beginning of the outbreak, some equipment like masks, gloves and disinfectants were rare, but today they are available and even some factories have changed their production line to make these items.

Iran Pursues Surge In Technology Trade

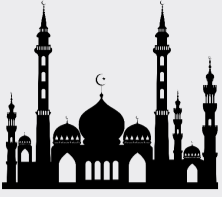
TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's technology trade has begun in the techno-market system which was approved by Iran's Vice-President for Science and Technology, the head of Pardis Technology Park said.

Iran's Pardis Technology Park held a ceremony on surge in technology trade on Sunday.

Mehdi Safarinia added that the plan pursues developing technology productions of knowledge-based companies, which is supported by the Vice-President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari.

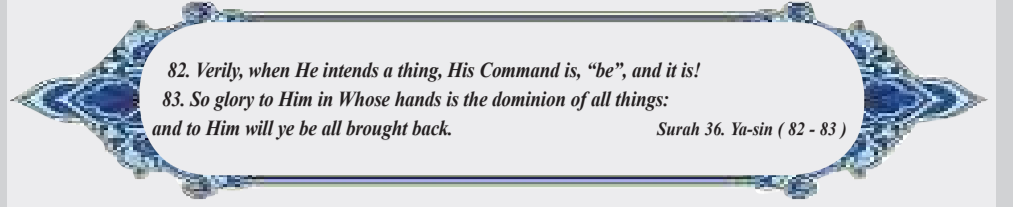
He added that the plan has two important features. First, supporting raw materials needed for production in provinces and industrial companies along with creating new opportunities, and second, distributing and selling which helps knowledge-based companies to sell their products.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:06
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:42
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:15



EAEU Accession Good Chance for Boosting Ties With Belarus

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Trade minister says the country's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) will be an ideal opportunity for the enhancement of trade cooperation between Iran and Belarus.

Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Rahmani said in a meeting with Belarusian Ambassador to Tehran Yuri Ivanovic Lazarcic that the two countries have what it takes to forge closer cooperation.

"The necessary potential exists [to boost ties]," said the minister, adding, "But obstacles to the expansion of relations should be carefully studied and removed."

Rahmani touched upon already reached agreements to expand Tehran-Minsk trade cooperation, and said more needs to be done.

"The conclusion of a preferential trade agreement between Iran and EAEU member states sets the stage for the enhancement of trade relations between the two countries, and bigger steps should be taken in that regard," he said.

"The general policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the enhancement of trade and economic ties is to pay due regard to the existing potential with friendly and neighbouring countries as well as increase trade with northern countries," the minister noted.

He urged both Iran and Belarus to focus on ideal areas for cooperation, and said both sides should take the initiative to create the necessary infrastructure and establish the required principles for closer cooperation.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the minister referred to threats to economic development of countries posed by the coronavirus pandemic.



"We should have precise planning for the post-coronavirus era and forthcoming trade opportunities, and attention should be paid to both sides' trade privileges in order to increase transactions," he added.

"To that end, we are prepared to provide the necessary facilities for businessmen and economic players of both sides, so that they will be able to take the necessary measures in more favourable conditions," he said.

Given the COVID-19 outbreak, he said, Iran stands ready to provide the necessary facilities to hold a meeting of the Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Commission via video conference.

The Belarusian ambassador, in turn, said his country tries its utmost to make the most of the existing opportunities to boost economic cooperation between the two sides.

Yuri Ivanovic Lazarcic said one of his key responsibilities is to work towards development of economic diplomacy between the two countries.

He expressed Minsk's readiness to hold a meeting of the Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Commission via video conference as well.

He recalled the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the economic development of many countries. He said the disease has created some problems in trade relations between countries, and added ground should be prepared for further expansion of cooperation.

Rimdan Border Reopened

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Rimdan border between Iran and Pakistan has reopened since April 25, according to an official at Iran customs.

Spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Rouhollah Latifi made the announcement on Sunday, saying that the Rimdan border was reopened by the Pakistani border guards on Saturday afternoon and 14 trucks carrying export goods have crossed this border.

According to the Pakistani side, only 20 trucks carrying foodstuff can cross the Rimdan border on Saturdays, Mondays, and Wednesdays, he added, saying that health protocols will also be preserved due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The trans-boundary market of Rimdan which is located 130 km from Chabahar in southeast Iran will resume operation in the next few days to ease trade between Iran and Pakistan, Latifi said.

On April 20, Iran and Pakistan exchanged views on border exchanges, the latest developments on the coronavirus, as well as issues related to border trade and economic relations in meeting between the Consul General of Iran in Quetta Mohammad Rafiei and Chief Minister of Balochistan Jam Kamal Khan.

IRICA and Pakistan Customs have an agreement according to which the data related to the customs cooperation of the two countries will be exchanged electronically.

IOTC Starts Executive Operation for Completing Road

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Iranian Oil Terminals Company (IOTC) Mr. Abbas Asadrouz inaugurated the project for completing the construction of a belt road which links Farhangian Sector to the end of Kharg Island Airport runway.

The ceremony was held in presence of Mr. Asadrouz and some urban officials of the island.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr. Asadrouz said that the project is for public utility and it is a part of the company's social responsibility for developing Kharg Island which is carried out by the company's own facilities and machineries.

He noted that the project is very important because the road links a company and working area to an urban area and suburbs of the island, and it can play a key role during the passive defense condition.

He said after a decade of dispute and problems, the first project began last year by using all potentials of the company which saved some 20b rials in cost.

Asadrouz noted the second phase now would start which will ease access between the oil areas with urban areas which will save some 30b rials.

The length of this part of the belt road is around one kilometers and its width is 13 meters.



Gov't to List Banks, Insurers in New IPO Worth Over \$1b



TEHRAN (PressTV)- The government is to list its shares in three banks and two insurance companies to raise over \$1 billion in new finances as more public firms launch initial public offering (IPO) in a stock market where trade is booming like never before.

Finance Minister Farhad Dejpassand said that the listing for the five government-run entities, which include Bank Mellat, Bank Tejarat, Bank Saderat, Alborz Insurance and Amin Reinsurance, would take place late next week in the Tehran Stock exchange (TSE).

Dejpassand said the five banks and insurers would form an exchange-traded fund (ETF) in a trade that is expected to generate 165 trillion rials (over \$1 billion) in new finances for the government.

The listing would come more than two weeks after an IPO for the Iranian government's largest investment holding, known as Shasta, generated more than \$400 million.

The IPOs are part of government plans to use a current boom in the TSE to shore up finances that have been hit by a series of US sanctions.

Dejpassand said IPOs for public companies will continue in the upcoming months with the listing of two major football clubs and several refineries and industrial units.

The minister said booming trade in the TSE, where overall value has already exceeded \$180 billion, was a good sign for an economy that needs new resources for investment.

He ruled out claims that there is a bubble in trades in the TSE, saying a handful of companies listed on the stock market may have offered shares on unrealistic prices.

"Based on our studies, there is no bubble in the market as a whole and I have not seen any study showing there is such a bubble," said the minister.

More than 3.448 billion shares changed hands in the TSE on Saturday, adding nearly \$320 million to the value of the market.

The TSE's overall value exceeded \$181 billion on Saturday as main index TEDPIX rose 3.76 percent to reach 789,820 points.

Generating Wealth From Mineral Raw Materials Replacing Oil-Reliant Economy

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company emphasized upgrading the technology in the steel industry, adding that some good progresses regarding the upgrading have happened at Mobarakeh Steel Company.

Speaking in the ground breaking ceremony for construction of primary stone-breaker No.B and 4.2m-ton crushing line No. 2, Eng. Hamidreza Azimian underscored efforts to upgrade the technology in the national steel industry, reiterating the company has witnessed good progresses regarding the upgrading.

Pointing to the economic profit by using sales and exports of various services in domestic market and abroad, he said due to the capability of companies like IRISA Company in Mobarakeh Steel Group, the company can export software services.

He reiterated that all should think universally in order that by implementing projects beyond the borders free from oil-reliant economy, the country can earn forex revenues for the country.



Azimian stressed that the group has necessary capacities and capabilities to institutionalize the strategy, adding that all departments in the group and IRISA Company can manage all issues related to indigenizing and possessing the technology.

He also called for integrity in the whole group and said any one of the companies in the group should not act individually instead they should act collectively as a group.

Azimian also called for research by using domestic expertise in the group and using scientific experiences of universities in the country.

He noted that since the group's thoughts are big, big events could happen, adding that today the second stone-breaker in Sang Foolad Company began its construction stage and in near future, the third phase of the furnace will be launched.

He emphasized since Mobarakeh Steel Company is an international enterprise, it is expected to act internationally.

He then announced that Mobarakeh Steel Group will focus on Hormuzgan region and implementing developmental projects in the region.

Iran Daily Gas Export to Iraq Hits 32m bcm

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Dispatching Director Mehdi Jamshidi Dana says although export of gas to Turkey has not resumed yet but Iran is currently exporting 32m cubic meters of gas per day to Iraq.

Speaking to IRNA, Jamshidi Dana said the gas line to Turkey has not been repaired yet and consequently Turkey has not mentioned any date for resumption of gas export.

He added that the gas pipeline between Iran and Turkey exploded on April 1 and if Turkey tries to repair it by its own it will take two and half a months.

The pipeline, which carries around 10 billion cubic meters of Iranian gas to Turkey annually, frequently came under attack by Kurdish militants since 1990s and up until 2013, when a ceasefire was established.

He noted that for this reason, resumption of gas exports to Turkey may happen in June.

Jamshidi Dana also said currently Iran's daily gas export to Iraq is 32m cbm, adding that some 190m cbm of gas is also delivered to the domestic power stations.

He concluded that since it is getting warmer, the gas consumption by households has decreased and the daily gas consumption in the country has dropped to 250m cbm.



NIDC Drills 15 Wells in March 20-April 20

TEHRAN (Shana) – The National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) has successfully spudded 15 oil and gas wells in oil-rich regions of the country in the first month of the Iranian calendar year (March 20-April 20, 2020).

According to NIDC, Babak Zangeneh, director of consolidated planning at NIDC, said the wells entailed appraisal, development and workover projects.

He said 14 of the wells were drilled in the fields operated by the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC).

Moreover, the company spudded 8,854 meters during the month and transferred 20 rigs for operational purposes.

According to Zangeneh, of 72 rigs in NIDC fleet, 59 rigs are operational currently.

Agricultural Unions Develop National HQ of Production Leap

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Making practical the motto of the new Persian year as the production leap, the rural and agricultural unions develop national headquarters to adopt the practical procedures for agricultural leap production, an official of the agriculture-jihad said.

Hossein Shirzad, who is also the chairman of the Board of the Central Organization for Rural Cooperatives of Iran (CORC), informed on the huge capacity of the rural and agricultural cooperatives for boosting agricultural yield.

"Realizing the orders of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Iran's agricultural and rural unions have issued new Regulations to explain and exercise the intended goals of the production leap in the agricultural sector", Shirzad added.

Through mobilizing the facilities of the rural and agricultural cooperatives' network, the official went on that CORC will surely play its key role to attain the goals of the production leap.



Johnson Confirmed to Return to Work April 27th

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will be back at work on Monday, a Downing Street spokeswoman confirmed on Saturday, after having recovered from a case of coronavirus that sent him to intensive care for three nights in early April.

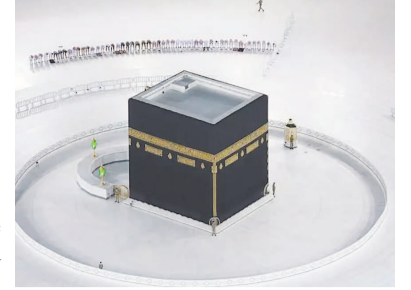
Johnson, 55, will take back control of a government under pressure from the economic fallout of shutdowns aimed at curbing the spread of the highly infectious virus, as well as a rising death toll. As of Saturday, Britain has recorded more than 20,000 deaths from COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. Criticism is growing over the government response to the pandemic, with limited testing and shortages of protective equipment for medical workers and carers.



Saudi Arabia Partially Relaxes Lockdown for Ramadan

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's King Salman issued an order to partially lift the curfew in all regions of the kingdom, to become from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., starting Sunday through Wednesday May 13, while keeping a 24-hour curfew in Mecca and in previously isolated neighbourhoods, state news agency (SPA) said early on Sunday.

The order also allowed the opening of some economic and commercial activities, which includes wholesale and retail shops in addition to malls, in the period from 6 to 20 Ramadan, which is from Wednesday April 29 to Wednesday May 13.



Global Coronavirus Death Toll Hits 200,000



LONDON (Reuters) - Global deaths linked to the coronavirus passed 200,000 on Saturday, while confirmed cases of the virus are expected to hit 3 million in coming days, according to a Reuters tally.

More than half of the fatalities have been reported by the United States, Spain and Italy.

The first death linked to the disease was reported on Jan. 10 in Wuhan, China. It took 91 days for the death toll to pass 100,000 and a further 16 days to reach 200,000, according to the Reuters tally of official reports from governments.

By comparison, there are an estimated 400,000 deaths annually from malaria, one of the world's most deadly infectious diseases.

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

The United States had reported more than 52,400 deaths as of Saturday morning, while Italy, Spain and France have reported between 22,000-26,000 fatalities each.

Of the top 20 most severely affected countries, Belgium has reported the highest number of fatalities per capita, with six deaths per 10,000 people, compared to 4.9 in Spain and 1.6 in the United States. Around 8% of all cases reported in the United States have been fatal, while more than 10% of cases reported in Spain and Italy have resulted in deaths.

However those rates would be considerably lower if the infection totals included the many cases of the illness that go unreported - since not everyone with symptoms is tested.

Asia and Latin America have each reported more than 7,000 deaths, while the Middle East has reported upwards of 8,800. The current toll in Africa is around 1,350. The global death toll has continued to grow at a rate of 3-4% per day over the past 10 days, though that rate has slowed since the beginning of the month.

The true number of fatalities is expected to be higher as many countries have not included deaths recorded in nursing homes and other locations outside hospitals.

Lebanon Bank Attacked With Explosive Amid Economic Crisis

BEIRUT (AFP) - Assaulters lobbed an explosive device at a bank in Lebanon Saturday, in the latest attack on financial institutions in a country facing its worst economic crisis in decades.

The official National News Agency said the night-time assault targeted a branch of Fransabank in the southern port city of Sidon, damaging its glass facade. There were no immediate reports of any casualties.

The attack came a day after Prime Minister Hassan Diab said Lebanese bank deposits had plunged \$5.7 billion in the first two months of the year, despite curbs on withdrawals and a ban on transfers abroad.

Lebanon is grappling with a severe lack of liquidity and an acute economic crisis that has been compounded since mid-March by a lockdown to combat the novel coronavirus. In recent months, the Lebanese pound, which has been pegged to the US dollar since 1997, has plummeted in value from around 1,500 pounds against the greenback to almost 3,800 on the parallel market.

Trump, Putin Issue Rare Joint Statement Promoting Cooperation

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin issued a rare joint statement on Saturday commemorating a 1945 World War Two link-up of U.S. and Soviet troops on their way to defeat Nazi Germany as an example of how their countries can cooperate.

The statement by Trump and Putin comes amid deep strains in U.S.-Russian ties over a raft of issues, from arms control and Russia's intervention in Ukraine and Syria to U.S. charges that Russia has spread disinformation about the novel coronavirus pandemic and interfered in U.S. election campaigns. The Wall Street Journal reported that the decision to issue the statement sparked debate within the Trump administration, with some officials worried it could undercut stern U.S. messages to Moscow.

The joint statement marked the anniversary of the April 25, 1945 meeting on a bridge over the Elbe River in Germany of Soviet soldiers advancing from the east and American troops moving from the West.

"This event heralded the decisive defeat of the Nazi regime," the statement said. "The 'Spirit of the Elbe' is an example of how our countries can put aside differences, build trust, and cooperate in pursuit of a greater cause."

The Journal said the last joint statement marking the Elbe River bridge link-up was issued in 2010, when the Obama administration was seeking improved relations with Moscow.

Trump had hoped to travel to Moscow to mark the anniversary. He has been complimentary of Putin, promoted cooperation with Moscow, and said he believed the Russian leader's denials of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Senior administration officials and lawmakers, in contrast, have been fiercely critical of Russia, with relations between the nuclear-armed nations at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

The Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday issued a bipartisan report concurring with a 2017 U.S. intelligence assessment that Russia pursued an influence campaign of misinformation and cyber hacking aimed at swinging the vote to Trump over his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.



EU Calls for Libya Truce, Resumption of Peace Talks

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Italy, along with the European Union's top diplomat, have issued a joint call for a ceasefire in Libya, urging the warring sides in the North African country to resume peace talks.

"We want to unite our voices to those of the UN Secretary-General [Antonio] Guterres and his Acting Special Representative for Libya, Stephanie Turco Williams, in their call for a humanitarian truce in Libya," they said in a statement on Saturday.

"We call on all the Libyan actors to get inspired by the spirit of the Holy Ramadan, engage in resuming talks for a genuine ceasefire," added the statement, signed by the EU's Josep Borrell, France's Jean-Yves Le Drian, Italy's Luigi di Maio and Heiko Maas of Germany.

Oil-rich Libya has been engulfed in chaos since 2011 when longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed in a NATO-backed uprising.

It is now split between two rival administrations: The Tripoli-based internationally-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) supported by Turkey, and the Tobruk-based House of Representatives allied to renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar and his self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) which enjoys the backing of, among others, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt.

In April 2019, Haftar launched a military campaign to wrest control of Tripoli but the offensive was largely stalled by forces loyal to the GNA.

The conflict escalated sharply this month after GNA-aligned forces launched a counteroffensive and expelled Haftar's troops from several western cities.

The joint statement came a day after GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj sent a message to the United Nations Security Council saying his administration opposes a new EU military operation in the Mediterranean Sea which was established to monitor a UN arms embargo on Libya.

The leader of the UN-recognised government said Operation IRINI neglected to control the airspace and land borders through which arms, equipment, and ammunition are reaching Haftar's forces.

Dozens of Anti-Lockdown Protesters Arrested in Berlin

BERLIN (AFP) - German police arrested dozens of protesters in Berlin on Saturday for flouting the coronavirus lockdown measures they were demonstrating against.

About 1,000 people turned out for the rally, which has become a weekly event in the German capital.

Saturday's protest attracted mainly far-left activists but there were also right-wing supporters and members of other fringe groups.

Police put up barriers around Rosa Luxemburg square, where the protesters were headed, leaving the participants to gather in nearby roads.

The protest "is not in line with the rules" in place to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, police said on Twitter, telling those taking part to disperse.

Some of the demonstrators wore T-shirts accusing Chancellor Angela Merkel of "banning life" while others simply called for "freedom".

Others brandished placards bearing slogans such as "Stop the pharmaceutical lobby".

The protest was unauthorised as a result of

emergency rules in Berlin banning gatherings of more than 20 people.

The protest organisers' website called for "an end to the state of emergency" and played down the threat posed by the virus.

Public discontent with the confinement rules has been growing gradually in Germany, as in other countries, though Merkel's popularity remains high.

She has received plaudits for her management of the health crisis which has seen Germany's COVID-19 toll -- 5,500 according to an AFP tally -- remain significantly lower than in Italy, Spain, France and Britain where the death tolls have all risen above 20,000.

Opposition to the lockdown measures is being led by the far-right, the main opposition force in the German parliament.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party accuses the government of exaggerating the risk posed by the virus and has called for the immediate reopening of all businesses.



Canada's Reopening Won't Depend on Immunity

MONTREAL (AFP) - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Saturday that Canada's approach to reopening its economy from the coronavirus shutdown would be "cautious" and not depend on the development of widespread immunity in the population.

"I don't think there are any of the plans that hinge on certain people or individuals being immune or having immunity to COVID-19," he said at a daily news briefing.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned Saturday that there was no proof that people who survive infection by COVID-19 gain immunity to the disease.

It cautioned against the idea, being entertained by some countries, of issuing "immunity passports" to such people as one step toward reopening economies.

Trudeau said immunity is "something we need to have clearer answers to. Until we have those clearer answers, we need to err on the side of more caution."

For now, he added, the emphasis would be on continuing to urge social distancing measures and providing more personal protective equipment.

Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, was even more definitive.

"The idea of sort of generating natural immunity is actually not something that... I think should be undertaken," she said.

"We would, you know, really be extremely cautious of that kind of approach," Tam added.

Authorities in Quebec had last week raised the possibility of gradually building collective immunity -- or herd immunity -- for people in the province. Trudeau met Friday with provincial leaders to discuss how to wind down weeks of confinement.

Each province will have to make its own adjustments, Trudeau said, while adding that the national government would retain an important coordinating role to avoid confusion.

Also Saturday, the outspoken premier of Ontario blasted a group of about 100 protesters as a "bunch of yahoos" after they rallied in front of the provincial legislature in Toronto to denounce stay-at-home measures and demand businesses reopen.



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J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Tajrish Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, Jacuzzi
marble fl
Fully Furn

Parsian

Pasdaran (\$2800)
300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, Jacuzzi
Large balcony
fireplace
pkg, F.F

Farmanieh Apt (\$2400)
300sq.m, 3bdrsm S/p
Sauna, Jacuzzi
balcony
F.F

Zaferanieh bldg (\$8000)
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S/p, S, J, pkg lots
storages, yard
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Dutch Readying 2-4b Aid Package for KLM

THE HAGUE (AFP) - The Dutch government plans to prop up KLM during the coronavirus crisis with an aid package worth between two to four billion euros, the finance minister said, shortly after Paris pledged help for partner airline Air France.

"I would like to announce that the cabinet intends to provide between two and four billion in financial support to KLM,"

Wopke Hoekstra told a news conference in The Hague.

"We are currently working out the exact form and details," Hoekstra said but he added the package will be "in the form of loans and guarantees." The Dutch national carrier, which flies from the global hub of Schiphol airport outside Amsterdam, has been hard hit by the impact of the virus on air travel, with more than 90 percent of its fleet grounded since last month.




Global Oil Supply To Fall 6% by 2030

LONDON (Dispatches) - Global oil supplies may be 6% less than expected by 2030 because of delays to investments by energy companies in response to falling crude prices due to the coronavirus crisis, data from energy analysts at Rystad showed.

Oil and gas companies across the world have slashed investment budgets, exiting projects or delaying bringing them onstream to counter a fall in crude prices to record lows due to a supply glut as the coronavirus outbreak destroyed demand.

Delayed final investment decisions (FID) for projects which take years to come on stream are already expected to shrink global supply of oil and gas by 5.6% by 2025, with the majority of the revisions coming from shale oil, mostly found in the United States, Rystad said.

Continental Resources, the largest oil producer in North Dakota has halted most of its production in the U.S. state and notified some customers it would not supply crude after prices dived into negative territory this week, people familiar with the matter said.

All this leaves the global oil and gas supply on track to drop off by 6.3% by 2030 compared with what was expected before the price crash, the Rystad data showed. It estimates that \$195 billion worth of non-shale projects are being delayed, most of which are gas and gas condensate field developments. Geographically the biggest slump is in the Middle East in that group.

Excluding the North American shale sector, energy analysts at Wood Mackenzie (Woodmac) reckon only about 10-15 large upstream projects have a "reasonable chance" of receiving a final investment green light this year, a level last seen during the post-2014 oil price crash.

That compares with around 50 projects tapping reserves of over 50 million barrels of oil equivalent each which had been pencilled in for a final investment decision this year before oil prices plummeted, according to Woodmac.

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects are also suffering.

"2020 was also set to be the record high year for LNG developments. The price crash and dip in global LNG demand delays FID of 7 LNG plants globally," Rystad analysts said in their report. Royal Dutch Shell even went so far as to completely exit its major Lake Charles LNG in the United States.

Venezuelan Oil Price Falls Below \$10, Lowest Level in 20 Years

CARACAS (Dispatches) - The price of Venezuelan oil has fallen to below \$10 a barrel -- its lowest level in more than two decades, the government said.

The oil ministry said the price between Monday and Friday was 70.62 Chinese yuan -- \$9.90 a barrel -- a level that has not been seen since 1998 when it was \$9.28.

Since 2017, the government of President Nicolas Maduro has announced its oil prices in yuan rather than dollars in protest over US sanctions.

The weekly price -- last year averaging \$56.70 and at \$61.41 in 2018 -- has fallen through the floor since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Oil prices have been sliding since 2014 and exacerbating the country's ongoing economic crisis that has pushed almost five million Venezuelans to leave the country, according to UN figures.

Venezuela is almost entirely dependent on its oil revenues, which account for around 96 percent of its income.

"It is an extremely extreme situation," oil expert Francisco Monaldi said this week in a meeting with the country's Foreign Press Association.

"Venezuela would normally need prices of more than \$30 to make it attractive to continue drilling and pay royalties," he said. "What we are experiencing is a kind of Armageddon."

Venezuela's oil production has fallen to around a quarter of its 2008 level. Maduro's government blames that on U.S. sanctions, including against state oil company PDVSA, but many analysts say the regime has failed to invest in or maintain infrastructure.

Although the South American country has the largest oil reserves in the world, the sector is a victim of corruption and lack of investment, according to analysts and the Venezuelan opposition.

Between 2004 and 2015, the country earned \$750 billion from its oil exports, the price of which peaked in 2011 and 2012 with an annual barrel average of \$101.06 and \$103.42 respectively.

But now, the government is running the printing press to make up for the budget deficit -- and fueling runaway inflation.

Despite a national lockdown because of the coronavirus, protests have bubbled up across the country as people experience shortages of food and medical necessities.

Pakistan Seeks \$1.7b ADB Loans to Cushion Exogenous Shocks

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan requested the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for \$1.7 billion loans in next eight months, including a fresh emergency facility of \$800 million, to help the country fight exogenous shocks and restore its economic growth.

The request was made during a virtual meeting between Economic Affairs Minister Makhdom Khusro Bakhtyar and ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa, said the economic affairs ministry. The Manila-based lending agency said the two discussed support for the government's response to the virus pandemic.

According to economic affairs ministry, Bakhtyar requested the ADB president for an early approval of \$500 million as countercyclical support and \$300 million emergency assistance lending (EAL) within this financial year.

The minister also sought the ADB president's support for a pipeline of \$900 million as various policy-based loans for reforms in capital markets, trade and competitiveness and energy sector to be approved by the ADB Board before the end of 2020, the ministry added.

The ADB said in a statement that Asakawa and Bakhtyar discussed how the ADB could scale up its support for the government's response to the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic. The statement was silent on Pakistan's request of \$1.7 billion ADB support.

However, it quoted Asakawa as saying that the "ADB is firmly committed to helping Pakistan fight this pandemic, reduce the impact on the poorest and most vulnerable groups across the country, and protect the economy".

Pakistan is seeking countercyclical support facility as budgetary support against exogenous shocks to restore growth. Unlike the programme loans, no policy matrix is required to get this assistance, according to a ministry official. The ADB charges London Interbank Offered Rate plus 2% interest rate and the facility is available for 10 years.

In addition, Pakistan is also seeking \$300 million loan for financial market development to enhance the efficiency, stability and inclusiveness of financial markets. The finance ministry has already prepared the policy matrix to seek this loan.

The government is also looking to secure \$500 million in the name of trade and competitiveness programme as budgetary support. The ADB has pegged this loan with the introduction of important tariff and tax-related policy. The ADB has already shared the first draft of policy matrix.

Indonesia Puts Capital Relocation Project on Hold

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia's investment in a mega project to relocate its capital city has been put on hold, as the country shifts focus to spend on containing the coronavirus outbreak, but the programme may resume next year, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said.

President Joko Widodo's US\$33 billion (S\$47.1 billion) project to relocate the capital of South-east Asia's largest economy out of the main Java island to the island of Borneo has yet to be approved by Parliament. However, the government had already put aside some funds for land acquisition this year.

The public works ministry, which is responsible for the project, has reallocated most of its spending, including the portion allocated for infrastructure projects, for the Covid-19 outbreak response, Ms Indrawati said late on Thursday.

"They have shifted their budget to upgrade hospitals, including expenditure related to the new capital city," she told the media in a video conference.

However, Indonesia's planning ministry is going ahead with a tender for the master plan of the new city, which is yet to be named and will be built in a remote area in East Kalimantan province, close to the port city of Balikpapan.

"I've asked the President whether we want to allocate some funds in the 2021 budget and he said judging from the current situation, we must remain careful," the minister said.



"But if the project is going to be supportive for economic recovery and it sparks confidence, then why not?" she added. Jakarta, the current capital, is home to 10 million people and is prone to floods and traffic gridlock and faces the risk of earthquakes.

Among other reasons, the East Kalimantan site was selected since it is a well-known part of the archipelago least prone to natural disasters.

The original timeline for the project is for the government to seek parliamentary approval this year and begin basic construction. Civil servants are expected to pack up and start moving by 2024.

Mr Joko has shifted state spending to make room for a greater allocation on healthcare and welfare amid the outbreak, which has so far infected over 8,000 people and caused 689 deaths in Indonesia.

Turkey's Economic Support Package Reaches \$29b

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish government's steps to support the economy in the face of the coronavirus pandemic have reached a value of TL 200 billion (\$28.7 billion), Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak said on Saturday.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan initially announced a TL 100 billion (\$14.3 billion) package to support the economy on March 18, postponing debt payments and reducing tax burdens in some sectors. Since then, Ankara has gradually widened the measures.

Turkey's confirmed cases of COVID-19 increased by 3,122 on Friday with the death toll rising to 2,600.

With the pandemic forcing businesses to furlough or lay off millions of staff, the government has also stepped in to top up income or pay daily stipends, while small businesses are being given access to fresh loans.

"The total value of the steps we have taken so far has reached TL 200 billion," Albayrak said in a video posted on his Twitter account.

Among the measures, funds totaling TL 107.4 billion has been provided to some 120,000 companies to support them during the outbreak, he said. An additional TL 16.8 billion has been provided in support to traders.

Minister emphasized that financial support has been paid to each of 4.4 million families, with a total of TL 22.3 billion set aside to meet the basic needs of some 4 million citizens.

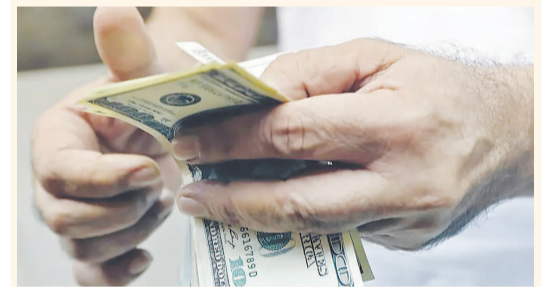
Turkey's Family, Labor and Social Services Minister Zehra Zümürüt Selçuk announced Monday that salaries of 3 million employees have been paid to bail out firms suffering amid the coronavirus lockdown.

"More than 268,000 firms have applied for the short-term employment allowance, which the government announced earlier this month to cushion the fallout of the pandemic," Selçuk tweeted.

"We will support our employees and employers by mobilizing all our resources at hand," she said.

She went on to say that 40% of the applications came from the manufacturing sector, 15% from retailers and wholesalers, 12% from hotels and food companies, 6% from the educational sector and 27% from miscellaneous firms.

Lebanon PM Says Bank Deposits Plunge \$5.7 b



BEIRUT (AFP) - Prime Minister Hassan Diab said that Lebanese bank deposits have plunged \$5.7 billion in the first two months of the year despite curbs on withdrawals and a ban on transfers abroad.

Lebanon is grappling with a severe lack of liquidity and its worst economic crisis in decades, compounded since mid-March by a lockdown to stem the novel coronavirus.

Banks have gradually restricted dollar withdrawals until halting them altogether last month, and transfers abroad have been banned.

But reports have circulated of persistent capital flight, the latest announced by Diab during a televised speech on Friday.

"Figures reveal the exit of \$5.7 billion worth of deposits from Lebanese banks in January and February this year" alone, the premier said.

A source close to the government said the large part of the \$5.7 billion had likely been transferred abroad. "Some portion of that was withdrawn and likely kept in households within Lebanon," the source said.

But "given that over the counter withdrawals were limited to relatively small amounts during that time period, one can logically conclude that a big portion of the \$5.7 billion left the country," the source said.

According to official estimates, \$2.3 billion were transferred abroad last year after the start of mass protests on October 17 against a political class demonstrators accused of being corrupt and inept.

The Lebanese pound has been pegged to the dollar since 1997, but in recent months it has lost more than half its value on the parallel exchange market.

Diab criticised the central bank and called on its governor Riad Salameh to "come forward to announce the honest truth to Lebanese". He urged the governor, who has held the post since 1993, to explain his plans and when the exchange rate would stop rising.

Central bank losses from the start of the year to mid-April have reached \$7 billion, including \$3 billion in the past four weeks alone, Diab said.

The premier said a "neutral international company" had been tasked to audit the central bank's books, without giving a name.

Imports of Basic Goods at 2.5 Fold Growth Despite Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of Government Trading Corporation of Iran (GTC) Amir Talebi said that basic goods and commodities imported into the country last year [ended March 20, 2020] recorded a 2.5fold growth as compared to the same period of last year. Despite tough sanctions imposed against Iran last year, import

of basic goods and commodities for storage operation registered about 2.5fold growth as compared to a year earlier. Most basic goods, imported into ports of the country last year, were relocated to permanent goods storage centers directly via vessels which was led to the reduced transportation costs as well as fast delivery of goods to the destination, he added.



WHO Warns Over Virus Immunity

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization warned on Saturday recovering from coronavirus may not protect people from reinfection as the death toll from the pandemic approached 200,000 around the globe.

Governments across 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 United Nations has joined world leaders in a push to speed up development of a vaccine, but effective treatments for COVID-19, the disease caused by coronavirus, are still far off.

But with signs the disease is peaking in the US and Europe, governments are starting to ease restrictions, weighing the need for economic recovery against cautions that lifting them too soon risks a second wave of infections.

The WHO warned on Saturday that there is still no evidence that people who test positive for the new coronavirus and recover are immunized and protected against reinfection.

The warning came as some governments study measures such as "immunity passports" or documents for those who have recovered as one way to get people back to work after weeks of economic shutdown.

"There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from #COVID19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," WHO said in a statement.

"People who assume that they are immune to a second infection because they have received a positive test result may ignore public health advice," it said.

On Friday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres asked for international organisations, world leaders and the private sector to join the effort to speed up development and distribution of a vaccine.

Any vaccine should be safe, affordable and available to all, Guterres said at a virtual meeting, which was attended by the leaders of Germany and France.

Absent though were the leaders of China, where the virus first emerged late last year, and the United States, which has accused the WHO of not warning quickly enough about the original outbreak. The spread of COVID-19 is increasing other medical risks as well with the WHO warning nearly 400,000 more people could die from malaria because of disruption to the supply of mosquito nets and medicines.

Saturday marked World Malaria Day, a disease which the WHO said could kill around 770,000 this year, or "twice as much as in 2018".

With more than four billion people still on lockdown or stay-at-home orders, governments are debating how to lift restrictions without causing a spike in infections and how to revive economies battered by weeks of closure.

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.

Global COVID-19 deaths have climbed past 197,000, according to an AFP tally, but new reported cases appear to have leveled off at about 80,000 a day.



The United States is the hardest-hit country by far in the pandemic, recording more than 51,500 deaths and over 890,000 infections.

Spain's daily virus toll -- the third highest fatality rate in the world -- rose slightly on Saturday with 378 people dying, a day after the country registered its lowest number of fatalities in four weeks.

In a sign of potential risks, Iranian health officials Saturday also raised fears of a "fresh outbreak" with another 76 fatalities declared, bringing Iran's official death toll to 5,650.

Iran has steadily allowed the reopening of businesses that were closed to stop the virus spread. But Alireza Zali, a health coordinator for the capital, criticised "hasty reopenings" that could "create new waves of sickness in Tehran".

The UN push for a quick vaccine came a day after US President Donald Trump prompted outcry and ridicule with his suggestion that disinfectants be used to treat coronavirus patients.

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 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.

April 25, 1980...

FROM PAGE 1

After this failure and its report to the Pentagon, U.S. President Carter from the White House (The Black House of today) ordered the return of forces. It seems he had dreamt what a nightmare awaited him. Hence, the operation for return of forces began. But when the planes and copters were to take off, suddenly sand storm began and God's hands appeared. A C130-aircraft and a RH-53 Sea Stallion chopper collided with each other and both caught fire and they were grounded. In this accident, eight experienced and trained U.S. navies burned in fire and rehearsed the hell and they left behind an experience for the history to be remembered. Actually four copters were unable to fly and they were grounded. So the U.S. troops with five remaining planes could reach USS Nimitz supercarrier and the operation ended in total failure even without being noticed by Iranian military forces.



It was surprising because the operation was being carried out in a relatively bright night and somewhat a moonlit night. It is obvious that in such nights there is no news of storms and heavy winds in desert and according to the U.S. meteorological office, the weather on the night of operation had been forecasted as clear and no storm had been forecasted.

President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski later in his book of memoirs wrote about this event and about President Carter's mood after ordering return of the troops and damages inflicted on the U.S. planes and copters. He described Carter's face and mood as follows, "The President held his head between his two hands and for some seconds put it on the table.... After hearing this bad news, he squirmed in anguish like a wounded snake, and concern was apparent in his face and he was swearing at his associates."

After the full collapse of the operation, which was aimed at taking Tehran, at martyring Imam Khomeini and at releasing hostages, U.S. forces were forced to escape with such a fiasco, and the White House in a statement officially accepted the defeat. According to the documents, American officials informed the then Iran President Abolhassan Banisadr that important documents had been left in the copters which seemed those documents include the directives for Americans' insiders in Iran who were to cooperate with them during the operation. So immediately, Banisadr, who was the commander of forces with Imam Khomeini's order, and with support of Hojjatoleslam Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ahmad Khomeini ordered directly bombarding the U.S. copters, and consequently the confidential and important documents in the copters burned into ashes and the Commander of the IRGC in Yazd Province Mohammad Montazer Ghaem, who was present in the operation scene to protect the copters till getting necessary order from the central headquarters, was martyred during the bombardment.

After this event, the late Imam Khomeini in a message said, "Was not it a hidden hand? Who brought down copters of Mr. Carter? Did we do? Sands brought them down. Sands and winds were God's agents."

And so the Tabas Nightmare as one of the biggest defeats of the Great Satan was registered in the history as a lesson for the posterity.

Iranian Regions...

FROM PAGE 1

President Rouhani explained that an area will be declared a white zone when there is no report of new coronavirus cases and deaths for two weeks.

The Health Ministry will be drawing a map to define the white, yellow and red zones according to its criteria, he added.

The president then underscored that the smart social distancing scheme must be strictly observed without any interruption, stressing that reopening of businesses should not translate into an end to COVID-19 and resumption of the normal life.

The best way to defeat the coronavirus epidemic is to observe the social distancing regulations, the health protocols, and personal hygiene, President Rouhani noted.

He further pointed to a new decision on the mandatory use of face masks and gloves in the subway, saying the Interior Ministry will announce the start of the compulsory plan.

President Rouhani also highlighted Iran's success in meeting the domestic demand for the medical supplies in the battle with the coronavirus, saying the hospitals across the country have been equipped with 1,100 more beds, 425 ICU (intensive care unit) beds, and 900 respiratory devices.

Merkel Bemoans Lack of Rain as Germany Fears for Its Forests



GUMMERSBACH (Reuters) - Germany's forests, covering a third of its territory and as much a part of its cultural landscape as its physical one, are in danger.

On Germany's annual "Day of the Tree", Chancellor Angela Merkel used her weekly video message to highlight a growing threat from climate change.

The last two exceptionally hot and dry summers have weakened millions of trees, undermining their defences against the bark beetle, which can be fatal to ancient woodlands.

And after an exceptionally dry April, with summer still two months away, a forest fire has already had to be put out near the town of Gummersbach in western Germany this week.

"We're already noticing these days that it's not raining enough in many areas of Germany," Merkel said.

Danny Ohnesorge, head of the Association of the German Wood Industry, told German radio there had been only 5% of the usual rainfall in April and that, if the drought continued, trees could die en masse.

Concern has been mounting in recent years about the impact of climate change on Germany's heavily forested landscapes, scene of many of its Romantic myths, legends and fairy tales.

Ursula Heinen-Esser, environment minister of the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia, said the soil had been wet enough until the beginning of March.

"Within a few weeks, it's completely reversed, and we're now dealing with drought," she said. "It'll also have a major impact on the forest and on bark beetle infestation."

There is always an increased risk of forest fires in spring from the dry, dead leaves lying on the ground before new plants grow, but it is particularly acute this year, said Mathias Niesar from the state's forest and climate protection team.

"This is an extremely explosive situation, where really just a few sparks or a spark can be enough to cause such a catastrophe here," he told Reuters television.

India Plans to Fast Track Chinese Investments After Policy Change

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India plans to fast track the review of some investment proposals from neighbouring countries such as China following concerns new screening rules could hit plans of companies and investors, three sources told Reuters on Saturday.

To avoid opportunistic takeovers during the coronavirus outbreak, India said this week that all foreign direct investment from countries sharing a land border would require prior government clearance, meaning they can't go through a so-called automatic route.

Advisers to Chinese firms have said they are concerned the process could take several weeks and hit deals and investment timelines. Auto firms such as SAIC's MG Motor and Great Wall, and investors Alibaba and Tencent have placed major bets on India.

The Chinese Embassy in New Delhi has called the new screening policy discriminatory.

A senior Indian government source who is involved in policymaking told Reuters that New Delhi will try to approve any investment proposal in a non-sensitive sector within 15 days when the stake being bought is not significant.

The official declined to elaborate on which sectors would be considered sensitive and what threshold of investment would be deemed significant.

"We will try to fast track investment proposals as soon as possible. It may be faster for some (sectors) and in others we might take some time," said the official, who did not



want to be named due to the sensitivity of the discussions.

Two other sources familiar with the government's thinking confirmed that a fast track mechanism was being considered, with possible approval timelines of seven days to four weeks.

India's ministry of commerce and industry did not immediately respond to

a request for comment. While the fast track mechanism would be open to all India's neighbours with a land border, China would be the main beneficiary. Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan, it has major existing and planned investments in India, which the Brookings research group estimated at \$26 billion.

Dipti Lavya Swain, a partner at Indian law firm HSA Advocates which advises Chinese companies, said sectors such as telecoms, financial services and insurance were likely to be deemed more sensitive than others such as automobiles and renewable energy.

"Approvals should be a seamless process and anything between two to four weeks could still be bearable," Swain said. "Sectors which are already under severe financial distress and do not concern national security should also receive faster approvals."

The new Indian screening rules are designed to prevent fire sales of corporate assets during the coronavirus outbreak but government sources have said they will also apply to greenfield investments, as well as investments from Hong Kong.

Death Toll of COVID-19...

FROM PAGE 1

He stated, "3,079 patients are in a critical condition."

So far, 421,313 COVID-19 diagnosis tests have been conducted in the country.

Meanwhile the deputy Health Ministry Iraj Harirchi in a live video press conference said health instructions in some places like industrial sections are perfectly implemented, but in some places are neglected.

In response to question on to what extend social distancing can guarantee people's health with regard to the reopening of parks and malls, the official stated that the procedures all deeply depend on people and those who monitor social etiquette and following of the hygienic protocols in the parks and malls. He added, "Some places like industrial sections the hygienic protocols are perfectly implemented but in some places are neglected."

"The protocols are required to be followed and implemented by the people who commute and visit these places," Harirchi reiterated. The deputy health minister said that infections among family members have rocketed over more family and friends' relations and the hygiene rules are not implemented as such.

"The parks are mainly for single-soul jogging and walking in the world, not for meetings or munching," he highlighted. The health official said that the relevant organizations and the health ministry itself are in charge of monitoring and checking the applied and protocols scrupulously and closely to be assured implemented by all walks of life.

Harirchi pointed out that the punishments, in general, can be used as deterrents for people to implement the hygienic protocols but we do not want to refer to them.

London Marathon May Now Be for Elite Only

LONDON (Dispatches) - This year's delayed London Marathon may now be restricted to elite runners only, race organiser Hugh Brasher has said.

However, he added this was just one of "ten scenarios" currently being considered by his team.

The 2020 edition of the race through the British capital was meant to take place on Sunday but has been postponed until October 4 because of the coronavirus outbreak.

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West Ham's Rice Glad of Virus Relief From Relegation Stress

LONDON (Dispatches) - Declan Rice has said one of the "nicer" consequences of the coronavirus outbreak is that it has temporarily removed the "stress" of West Ham's fight against Premier League relegation.

The Hammers were above the bottom three on goal difference with nine games to play when the English top flight was suspended last month as a result of the pandemic.

Chelsea Tell Players to Donate to Charity

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea have said they won't impose a pay cut on their first-team squad in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

But the Premier League side added Saturday they had asked players to continue donating to charities during the ongoing pandemic.

It has been reported the west London club have been in talks with their players about a salary reduction of around 10 percent in a bid to reduce costs at a time when football has been suspended because of the virus.

That figure, however, is significantly lower than the Premier League's suggestion of 30 percent for all clubs. But that has not stopped the Stamford Bridge side from taking their own course of action as they highlighted the #PlayersTogether initiative launched by Premier League players earlier this month, which aims to raise and distribute funds for charities supporting Britain's National Health Service (NHS).

"Representatives of the Chelsea board have recently held extensive talks with the men's first team to discuss how they can contribute financially to the club during the coronavirus crisis," said a club statement.

"The objective of these talks has been to find a meaningful partnership around ensuring we preserve jobs for staff, compensate fans and participate in activities for good causes.

"We are grateful to the team for having played their role in assisting the club with community activities as well as all the charitable causes they have been supporting in their respective home countries and through the Players Together initiative supporting the NHS."

Arsenal to Re-Open Training Ground to Players

LONDON (Reuters) - Arsenal will re-open their London Colney training ground to their players next week for individual training but the Premier League club will continue to observe social distancing rules amid the coronavirus outbreak, they said on Saturday.

Soccer in England was suspended indefinitely last month due to the virus and no clubs have been in training.

"Players will be permitted access to the Colney grounds next week," Arsenal said in a statement.

"Access will be limited, carefully managed and social distancing will be maintained at all times. All Colney buildings remain closed.

"Players will travel alone, do their individual workout and return home," the club added.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was diagnosed with the novel coronavirus on March 12, which led to the Premier League postponing the next round of matches and none have been played since.

Arsenal spoke to all their players after Alexandre Lacazette, David Luiz, Nicolas Pepe and Granit Xhaka were pictured allegedly breaking social distancing guidelines.

Premier League clubs have been working on the basis that the earliest they may be allowed to resume training would be in early May. The British government is expected to review current lockdown restrictions on May 7.

Should teams be allowed to train, it is expected they would need two to three weeks to get prepared to play competitive matches, making the earliest possible return in June.

But with the ban on mass public gatherings likely to be one of the last restrictions to be lifted, rescheduled games will almost certainly be held behind closed doors.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has been liaising with a number of sports bodies, led by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on how things might work should the green light be given by the medical experts for sport to resume safely.



on June 8, behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic, and reaching a climax on July 27, according to The Times.

The paper claims football chiefs, along with other sports governing bodies, have been holding talks with the British government about when they can resume and at only "approved grounds".

The Premier League has 92 games remaining since it suspended the season on March 13 with Liverpool agonisingly close to their first ever EPL title.

The Times says Premier League bosses shared their idea 'Project Restart' with the shareholders last week.

The matches would be played behind closed doors -- a maximum of 400 people would be permitted to attend including media though only if they tested negative for the virus -- and at selected stadia to limit stretching the limited resources of the medical services.

Extra changing facilities would be introduced to ensure social distancing measures were in place whilst players would be required to turn up for training individually and already in their kit.

They have also suggested August 22 as the date for the start of the 2020/21 campaign.

Ziyech Happy That Future Is Secure



AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - New Chelsea signing Hakim Ziyech said he was grateful his future with the Premier League club was secure before the uncertainty over football's immediate future caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Dutch-born Morocco international midfielder signed a five-year contract, starting next season, with the London club in February after a move from Ajax Amsterdam.

"Of course, this clarity is reassuring because nobody knows exactly what is going to happen to the transfer market," he told the Dutch daily Algemeen Dagblad.

But he was never concerned his own circumstances might change after the suspension of football in England last month.

"I really haven't had any doubt for a single second. My signature is on the contract and so yes, on July 1 I will be a Chelsea player. I've never had any other thought," he said.

Ziyech's season finished when the Dutch league was prematurely brought to an end after a government ban on public events was extended this week. On Friday, the Dutch football association (KNVB) said Ziyech's club would not be awarded the title despite leading the standings when the league was suspended last month.

Wolves' Jota Wins ePremier League Title



LONDON (Reuters) - Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Diogo Jota won the ePremier League Invitational title for his club on Saturday after beating Liverpool full back Trent Alexander-Arnold with a golden goal in the final after the match ended 1-1 in regular time.

A number of top-flight players had signed up to represent their clubs in the virtual tournament to generate funds for Britain's National Health Service (NHS) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Raul Jimenez scored the winning goal for Wolves and Jota in the FIFA 20 match after Georginio Wijnaldum put Liverpool ahead late in the first half, only for Adama Traore to level the scores after the interval.

Alexander-Arnold beat England team mate and Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling with a Roberto Firmino golden goal in the first semi-final earlier on Saturday, with Jota triumphant over Burnley's Dwight McNeil in the second semi-final.

The winner's prize fund will be donated to the PlayersTogether initiative, created by Premier League players to generate funds for the NHS.

In real life, Liverpool were top of the league, 25 points ahead of second-placed Manchester City, with Wolves sixth in the standings before English soccer was suspended indefinitely last month because of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Ferrari Remain Committed to F1 After Quit Reports



LONDON (Reuters) - Ferrari have said they remain committed to Formula One after reports on Thursday that the sport's oldest and most successful team could walk away if a proposed budget cap for 2021 was set too low.

Britain's Guardian newspaper suggested Ferrari were prepared to quit in a headline, later replaced, over an interview with team boss Mattia Binotto.

A Ferrari spokeswoman said Binotto had not mentioned the team leaving Formula One. "On the contrary, he said that we would not want to be put in a position of having to look at further options, besides continuing racing in F1, for deploying our racing DNA," she added.

Binotto had told the Guardian that a drastic budget cut, called for by some teams as they face the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, put at risk hundreds of jobs at their Maranello factory.

"The \$145 million level is already a new and demanding request compared to what was set out last June," he said.

"It cannot be attained without further significant sacrifices, especially in terms of our human resources."

Formula One is due to introduce a budget cap of \$175 million in 2021 but teams are discussing reducing that.

Rossi Expects to Decide Future Before Season Starts



ROME (Reuters) - Italian MotoGP great Valentino Rossi says he wants to continue racing next year, when he will be 42, but will likely have to commit before he can see how competitive he is this season.

A string of MotoGP races have been postponed until the end of June at the earliest due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more likely to follow due to bans on large gatherings and sporting events.

Rossi will leave the main Yamaha team at the end of 2020 but has a seat at the satellite Petronas Yamaha outfit if he wants it in a straight swap with 21-year-old French rider Fabio Quartararo.

"I think that I will have to decide before racing because in the most optimistic situation we can race in the second half of the season, so around August or September we hope, if everything is good," Rossi said in a Yamaha Q&A on YouTube.

"But I have to make my decision before. I want to continue but I have to do this decision without making any races."

"It is not the best way to stop because the situation is maybe we also don't race in 2020. It is more fair to make another championship and maybe stop at the end of the next. I hope to continue in 2021," he added.